

1.3 Looked after children

Policy statement

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

Children become 'looked after' if they have either been taken into care by the local authority, or have been accommodated by the local authority (a voluntary care arrangement). Most looked after children will be living in foster homes, 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 may have 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 an impact on their emotional well-being.

We place emphasis on promoting *children's right to be strong, resilient and listened to*. Our policy and practice 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 well-being 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 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.

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.
- If available we offer places for funded three and four-year-olds who are in care to try to ensure they receive their entitlement to early education. Places for two year olds may also be available.
- 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.

Procedures

- The designated person for looked after children is Allison Warner DSL.

- Every child is allocated a key person before they start and this is no different for a looked after child. The designated person ensures the key person has the information, support and training necessary to meet the looked after child's needs.
- The DSL 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 setting 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 parent's or foster carer's role in relation to the setting without prior discussion and agreement with the child's social worker.
- At the start of a placement there is a professionals meeting that will determine the objectives of the placement and draw up a care plan that incorporates the child's learning needs. The care plan needs to consider such issues for the child as:
 - the child's 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(s) and identity – and 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; and
 - how any special needs will be supported.
- In addition the care plan will also consider:
 - how information will be shared with the foster carer and local authority (as the 'corporate parent') 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. If this is to be the setting, when, where and what form the contact will take will be discussed and agreed;
 - 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 worker's 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 and fun-days, 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 parent, unless otherwise agreed. It is even more important that the pre-school separation policy 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 well-being is the focus of observation, their sociability and their ability to manage their feelings with or without support.
- Further observations about communication, interests and abilities will be noted to firm a picture of the whole child in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage prime and specific areas of learning and development.
- 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 and reported to the child's social care worker according to the setting's 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 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.

This policy was adopted at a meeting of

St Matthew's Preschool

Held on

_____ (date)

Date to be reviewed

_____ (date)

Signed on behalf of the management committee

Name of signatory

Role of signatory