

POLICY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

BACKGROUND

All schools should have a policy for Looked After Children (LAC) which is subject to review and approval from the Governing Body. The Policy should set out not only the ethos of the school in its approach to meeting the needs of looked after children but also the procedures.

There has been concern since the mid-Seventies that the education of children in care has been neglected. Conversely, from about the same time, attention was also being drawn to the important part that successful schooling could play in helping children escape from social disadvantage. As recently as 1995 a joint report by the Social Services Inspectorate and Ofsted stated that the care and education systems were failing to promote the educational achievement of children in care and draw attention to:

- Poor exam success rates in comparison with the general population.
- A high level of disruption and change in school placements.
- Lack of involvement in extra curricular activities.
- Inconsistent or no attention paid to homework.
- Underachievement in further and higher education.

It is, therefore, essential that schools promote the achievement of such vulnerable children.

The Policy should include:

(a) The Objectives of the Policy

Eg To promote the educational achievement and welfare of looked after pupils

(b) Definition of Looked After Pupils

Eg The Children Act (1989) introduced changes in terminology. The term 'in care' now refers solely to children who are subject to Care Orders. Children who are cared for on a voluntary basis are 'accommodated' by the local authority. Both these groups are said to be 'looked after' by the local authority.

Accommodated children also include those in receipt of respite care - if it exceeds 20 days in one episode or over 120 days in a year.

It is important not to confuse a young person's legal status with their living arrangements. For example, a child on a Care Order can be living with:

- foster carers
- in a children's home
- in a residential school
- with relatives, or
- even with parents - under the supervision of the Social Services Department.

Similarly, an 'accommodated' child can be living:

- in foster care
- in a children's home
- in a residential school
- or even, very unusually, with parents

(c) The Name of the Named Teacher for Looked After Children

(d) The Role of the Named Teacher

Eg *Within School Systems:*

- To ensure that all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, are aware of the difficulties and educational disadvantage faced by children and young people 'looked after' and understand the need for positive systems of support to overcome them.

- To inform members of staff of the general educational needs of children who are looked after, and to promote the involvement of these children in school homework clubs, extra curricular activities, home reading schemes, school councils, etc.
- To hold a supervisory brief for all children being looked after, eg to ensure all relevant education and care information is available to school staff and carer(s), and that this information is kept up to date.
- To monitor the educational progress of all children who are looked after in order to inform the school's development plan.
- To intervene if there is evidence of individual underachievement.
- To develop and monitor systems for liaising with education, carers and the Social Services Department (SSD) for reporting and recording absence from school and by acting to address these issues through early and positive intervention.
- To ensure the involvement of the Careers Service with children in Years 10 and 11 who are looked after.

Work with Individual Looked After Children

- To work with individual children, possibly through a carer, to arrive at a statement about their circumstances that they would be happy to share with staff and/or pupils.
- To enable the child to make a contribution to the educational aspects of their Care Plan.
- To ensure that each pupil has an Individual Education Plan.

Liaison

- To liaise with the member of staff responsible for monitoring children on the Child Protection Register.
- To co-ordinate education and SSD review meetings, so that any Individual Educational Plans can inform the child's Care Plan.
- To attend, arrange for someone else to attend, or to contribute in other ways to SSD's care planning meetings.
- To be the named contact for colleagues in Education and SSD.
- To report on the progress of all looked after children to Education.

Training

- To develop knowledge of SSD/Education procedures by attending training events.
- To cascade training to school staff as appropriate.

(e) Role of Named Governor

Eg The named governor will report to the Governing Body on an annual basis:

- The number of looked after pupils in the school.
- A comparison of test scores as a discrete group, compared with those of other pupils.
- The attendance of pupils as a discrete group, compared to other pupils.

- The level of fixed term/permanent exclusions.
- Pupil destinations.

The named governor should be satisfied that the school's policies and procedures ensure that looked after pupils have equal access to:

- The National Curriculum
- Public Examinations
- Careers Guidance
- Extra Curricular Activities
- Work Experience
- Additional Educational Support

(f) Responsibility for LAC in School

Eg It is important that all teaching staff who are in contact with the child or young person are aware that he/she is being looked after by the Local Authority. The responsibility for the transfer of this information should be that of the Headteacher and/or the person named as the Co-ordinator for 'Looked After Children' within the school.

It is appropriate for a classroom support assistant to have knowledge that the young person is being looked after only when directly involved in the teaching of the young person.

In the absence of the usual class teacher, some information regarding the child's circumstances should be shared with the teacher covering the class. The extent of this sharing should be determined by the Headteacher or the School's Co-ordinator for 'Looked After Children'.

(g) Admission Arrangements

Eg On admission, records will be requested from the pupil's previous school. A meeting will be held with carer/parent/Social Worker as appropriate to complete base line information to inform the pupil's Individual Education Plan and clarify contact arrangements. A home school agreement will be drawn up with the primary carer. An appropriate school induction will take place.

(h) Involving the Young Person

Eg It is important that a young person is aware that information is being recorded regarding their personal circumstances. How this is shared with them clearly depends on their age and understanding. The explanation should emphasise that the school, the Social Worker, and their carer(s) are working together to promote their education.

It is important to establish the child's view of their changed circumstances and what they want others to know. It is also important to ensure that a named teacher/carer prepares the child for situations when they be asked about home, eg by other pupils in the playground.

(i) Communication with Other Agencies

Eg Ideally, the Social Worker and the School Co-ordinator for 'Looked After Children' should meet when the young person becomes looked after, or when they join the school. This will enable information concerning the child's progress and circumstances to be shared. The monitoring form should help ensure that all information relevant to school is exchanged.

Schools should ensure that a copy of all reports (eg end of year) should be forwarded to the young person's Social Worker in addition to, for example, the foster carer or residential Social Worker.

Schools, the Education Service and the Social Services Department should endeavour to co-ordinate their review meetings, eg to have an Annual Review of a Statement combined with a Statutory Care Review.

Social Services, Education and Leisure Services, and schools will need to exchange information between formal reviews if there are significant changes in the young person's circumstances, eg if school is considering an exclusion, there is a change of care placement or there are significant attendance issues.

(j) Assessment, Monitoring and Review Procedures

Eg Each looked after pupil will be given an Individual Education Plan (see Appendix A). This will identify specific areas of concern and achievable targets.

Areas for consideration will include:

- Attendance
- Achievement Record (academic or otherwise)
- Behaviour
- Homework
- Involvement in Extra Curricular Activities
- Relationship to Care Plan
- Special Needs (if any)
- Development Needs (short and long term development of skills, knowledge or subject areas and experiences)
- Long term plans and aspirations (targets including progress, career plans and aspirations)

Liaison will be undertaken with Education Welfare/Education Psychology/Social Services, etc in the assessment and review processes as appropriate.

The named governor will report annually to the Governing Body on the key indicators outlined on page 3.