Children Looked After Policy & Guidance

Policy
To ensure the promotion of educational achievement and welfare of Children Looked After, Treehouse School will support the corporate parenting of this vulnerable group, ensuring all statutory responsibilities are fulfilled.

Purpose
To promote the educational achievement and welfare of looked after children within Treehouse School.

Rationale
Children looked after (CLA) are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The majority of looked after children have suffered abuse or neglect and it is nationally recognised that considerable educational underachievement exists when compared to their peers.

Aims of the Guidance
'Corporate Parenting' emphasises the collective responsibility of the whole local authority to achieve good parenting. We recognise that we are an essential partner in this process and as such, we aim to:

- Act as an effective advocate for any child in public care attending our school;
- Implement the relevant statutory elements of the Guidance;
- Have high expectations of children in public care attending school;
- Develop and implement effective inclusive strategies;
- Intervene early and appropriately to support any child in public care who is experiencing difficulties, liaising promptly with other professionals;
- Work in partnership with parents, carers and social workers to gather and share information to plan and monitor achievement;
- Listen to the child or young person and/or closely observe and aim to understand their behaviour and its communicative intent or function, respecting their rights of confidentiality.

Equal Opportunities and Valuing Diversity
We believe that children in public care are individuals, with distinct identities and needs shaped by their racial origins, religious beliefs, their gender and sexuality and whether or not they are in any way disabled. They all have the potential and equal right to succeed.

National and Local Context
The number of Children looked after (CLA) in England has increased steadily over the last eleven years. At. 31 March 2020, there were 80.080 looked after children. In 2020 30,970 children started to be looked after. For most children care is intended to be time limited with the aim of returning home as soon as possible. Although there are many reasons why children are looked after by local authorities, they are all likely to have undergone distressing experiences. It is important that schools, the Local Authority, carers and parents (where appropriate) work together, and intervene early to support these particularly vulnerable children to achieve their educational potential, thus improving their life chances.

Definitions

Children Looked After (CLA)
Under the Children Act 1989, a child is 'looked after' by a local authority if he or she is in their care or provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by the authority. They fall into four main groups:

- Children who are accommodated under a voluntary agreement with their parents (section 20);
- Children who are the subjects of a care order (section 31) or interim care order (section 38);
- Children who are the subjects of emergency orders for their protection (sections 44 and 46);
- Children who are compulsorily accommodated – this includes children remanded to the local authority or subject to a criminal justice supervision order with a residence requirement (section 21).

Children In Care
The term 'In Care' refers only to children who are subject to a care order by the Court under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 - they may live with Foster Carers, in a Children's Home, in a residential school, with relatives or with parents under supervision.

Accommodated Children
Children who are cared for on a voluntary basis are 'accommodated' by the local authority under Section 20 of the Children Act – they may live in foster care, in a children's home or in a residential school.

All these groups are said to be 'Looked After Children' (LAC). They may be looked after by one Local Authority but may be living in another authority.

Legislation
The Keeping Children Safe in Education (updated July 2021) includes previously looked after children as a vulnerable group. Part 2 – The management of Safeguarding states 'previously looked after children remain vulnerable and it's important that agencies work together to safeguard them. All staff should have the skills, knowledge and understanding to keep previously looked after children safe'.

Under section 52 of the Children Act 2004 (November 2005), local authorities have a duty to promote the educational achievement of the children in their care. In order for them to implement this duty successfully, they will need the active co-operation of schools. School governing bodies have a major responsibility for helping children to succeed: they can champion their needs and raise awareness.

Potential Barriers to Success
The Social Exclusion Unit's report 'A Better Education for Children in Care' (SEU 2004) identified five key reasons why looked after children underachieve:

- Their lives are characterised by instability;
- They spend too much time out of school;
- They do not have sufficient help with their education if they fall behind;
- Primary carers are not expected or equipped to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development;
- They have unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs that impact on their education. Key Elements of Guidance to Local Authorities and Schools (2005/06).

Requirements

- Every school must have a designated teacher to act as an advocate for children in care, at Treehouse School this is the Assistant Head (Head of Pupil Development, Behaviour, and Welfare) (for detailed responsibilities see Appendix 1).
- Each looked after child or young person must have a Personal Education Plan.

- Local Authorities must have a protocol for sharing information.
- Care placements are only to be made when education is secured - except in emergency situations.
- All children in public care must have educational arrangements in place within 20 days of entering care.

School Governing Body responsibilities

Statutory guidance for school governing bodies, 2018, states that:

The way in which the role of the designated teacher will be carried out will vary from school to school. It will depend on the number of looked after children on roll and their individual needs as well as, for example, whether the school caters for primary or secondary age children. If, for example, a secondary school had a significant number of looked after children on roll the Governing Body may decide to designate more than one qualified teacher, perhaps with one responsible for pre-16 and a second for post-16 pupils.

The designated teacher should be given the appropriate level of support in order to fulfil their role. Some schools may never have had a looked after child on roll and the designated teacher may not, therefore, be familiar with some of the issues and processes they need to know about.

The Governing Body should, in partnership with the Head of School, ensure that, through their training and development, the designated teacher has the opportunity to acquire and keep up-to-date the necessary skills, knowledge and training to understand and respond to the specific teaching and learning needs of looked after children.

Governing bodies and the School Leadership Team (SLT) should also make sure that the designated teacher role contributes to the deeper understanding of everyone in the school who is likely to be involved in supporting looked after children to achieve.

School Responsibilities

Designated Teacher
In the statutory guidance of roles and responsibilities of the designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children it states that all schools must designate a teacher for children in public care. This teacher must understand about care and its impact on education; they should preferably be a senior member of staff who will act as an advocate for looked after children, and who will be critical to tackling underachievement. The designated teacher at TreeHouse School is the Assistant Head (Head of Pupil Development, Behaviour, and Welfare).

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)
It is a statutory requirement that every looked after child has a Personal Education Plan, this forms part of their statutory Care Plan. The child's Social Worker should initiate the PEP working with relevant teachers/education professionals. It is a record of what needs to happen for the child to enable him/her to fulfil their potential and it reflects any existing education plans, such as a statement of special educational needs and Individual Education Plan (IEP). The child should be involved in this process and the PEP should be reviewed regularly.

Attendance
The school will ensure that all pupils attend regularly; continuity and stability are known to promote educational success for children in public care.

Often school can be a lifeline when care placements are changing. However, where non-attendance is identified, early intervention is essential. Working in partnership with the Social Workers, Foster Carers, Education Welfare Officers, and/or ECPC, the school will take positive action quickly to avoid

unauthorised absences.

Raising Achievement
The school sets challenging targets for looked after children and has high expectations of them, both with regard to attainment and also participation in broader school activities. It recognises however that there are often additional hurdles for them to surmount because of their early life experiences; support will be offered where appropriate to help them achieve their potential. Teachers recognise that sensitivity is needed in dealing with aspects of the curriculum which deal with family values and experiences which are likely to either rekindle distressing memories or put the spotlight on the child.

Links with other school policies and legislation
These guidelines are translated into action through other policies and procedures, e.g.

- Behaviour policy
- Adult Safeguarding Policy and Procedure
- Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedure
- PSHE and RSE Policy
- Exclusion Policy
- Anti-bullying Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Admissions policy

Appendix 1

The role of the designated teacher for Children in Public Care (LAC, CLA), who at TreeHouse School is the Assistant Head (Head of Pupil Development, Behaviour, and Welfare, Sean Egan):

- To maintain a register of children in public care;
- To act as an advocate for the children within school;
- To attend any relevant training on children in public care and their needs, and passes on key messages to other school staff;
- To ensure that each child has a Personal Education Plan;
- To encourage colleagues to have high expectations of the children, while also being aware of possible obstacles to achievement;
- To ensure good liaison with Social Care and other agencies;
- To ensure there is an induction meeting for every child, in order to support their transition;
- To ensure educational information is passed on promptly between schools/agencies with relevant personal information being shared sensitively and with the child's knowledge;
- To promote good communication between teachers and carers;
- To promote sensitivity in choice of curricular topics and approaches for children not living with their birth families;
- To ensure that the child is encouraged and supported to access the full range of activities in an outside school that are appropriate to his or her needs;
- To ensure that the child has a member of staff with whom they can communicate their needs, e.g. their key worker.

Further information on the role of the designated teacher can be found in the statutory guidance on the role and responsibility of the designated teacher for looked-after and previously looked-after children February 2018.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683561/The_designated_teacher_for_looked-after_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf