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| **Norfolk Fostering Service Education Policy and Procedure** |
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**SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER**

**Legislation:**

1989 Children Act

Children and Young Persons Act 2008

Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

Special Guardianship Guidance, DfES 2005

Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010

National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010

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 **1.** **Principles**

All carers will actively promote achievement of children through education.

All carers will take part in developing the child’s Personal Education Plan.

All carers will ensure that a child attends any educational provision provided for them.

All carers will advocate for a child’s education with the child’s social worker and school.

All carers will provide learning opportunities through recreational pursuits.

**2.** **National Minimum Standard 8**

**Outcome:**

The education and achievement of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential.

**3. Procedure**

It is critical that Norfolk Fostering Services engages with our foster carers to promote educational attainment. To this end we should workers should ensure that education is included in all supervisions and the following expectations are included:

* promote the value of education to the child and support the school and Local Authority in all their efforts to provide the child with a good education
* ensure that your foster child attends any early years provision, school or college, depending on whichever is relevant
* accompany your foster child to their early years setting or school, unless your child is of an age and ability to go on their own or the school is so far away that transport has to be provided
* when a child is placed with you, introduce yourself to the early years setting or school and to the designated teacher for Looked After Children in the school
* maintain contact with the school, share information about your foster child when needed with the early years setting or school and attend parent’s evenings and school functions, such as school plays, sports days and any award ceremonies, as any other parent would do
* talk with your foster child about what is happening at school and how they are getting on
* show an interest in everything they do in school
* celebrate any successes that your foster child has in school with them
* ensure that your child has somewhere quiet to study and access to a computer to support their education and encourage them to do their homework
* keep any certificates that they get from school and information about school trips to go in their record of achievement or life story book
* have a supply of children’s books for younger children, which includes those that deal with topics such as being in care, losing family, bereavement, going to early years settings, going to the dentist etc
* ensure that all your foster children join a library
* read to your foster child frequently and regularly, if they are of an age where this is appropriate (this can be done as part of the bedtime routine each day)
* take your foster child out on family trips which include visits to more educational places as well as purely fun places in order to broaden their horizons and develop their general education
* encourage them to use out of school and after school facilities
* pick up on their interests and hobbies and provide them with books, information and materials to encourage them in their specific interests
* seek support from the child’s social worker or your family placement worker, especially when problems occur and let them know of any problems at school in good time
* take part in developing the child’s Personal Education Plan
* be an advocate for your child’s education with the child’s social worker and school.

**4.** **Guidance for staff and foster carers in preparing a child for school**

Neglected and abused children are less likely to be ready for school than other children due to their early experiences. They may have difficulty concentrating, show agitated or hyperactive behaviour, have difficulty fitting into a group and at worst there may be some developmental delay.

Nevertheless, it is important to prepare our children for school as best we can, if we want to minimise their disadvantages. By the time they start school they should be able to put on their coat and dress themselves. They should be able to hold and use a pencil, crayon or brush and recognise their name when they see it written.

It is unlikely that neglected children will have been shown much interest by their parent and they may be behind in their language. It is important for foster carers not only to read to the under fives, but also to spend a lot of time talking to them. Singing to them and reciting nursery rhymes is also important. This is the way we first learn to speak and develop our language. Without language children cannot recognise the meaning of words and are less likely to be interested in reading. Without being able to read, they will find writing more difficult.

Foster carers should have a wide range of children’s books available for the under fives.

They should also have a rich variety of toys and play things, both for indoor and outdoor use. Neglected children will probably have had little opportunity for constructive play or have been left to their own devices for long periods of time. It is essential for foster carers to encourage play, to talk to the child about what they are doing and get excited about their achievements.

It is through play also that children learn to take turns and to share. These are essential social skills that children should have by the time they start school for they will be needed when they have to be part of a larger group.

To a large extent children who have had the benefit of going to an early years setting will have learnt these things there, but these efforts need to be supported by the home. Home is where we first learn to speak, to make relationships and find out about the world and it cannot be left entirely to the early year’s setting.

You can keep up to date with information about the early years and preparing children for school by looking online at [www.foundationyears.org.uk](http://www.foundationyears.org.uk) . This has information for parents and practitioners.

**5.** **Starting a new school**

The onus is on Children's Services to keep a child coming into care in the same school. For older children in years 10 and 11 a move to another school should only be made in exceptional circumstances. In most cases therefore the decision about where the child is to go to school should have been made before they are placed with you.

Where a placement has been made in an emergency the Local Authority has to secure a new place in suitable education, if it is needed, within 20 school days. This is also true if the school placement breaks down for any reason.

The child’s social worker is responsible for arranging placements in schools, so you will need to discuss any of these issues about admissions with them. However, when a child is placed with foster carers, they should contact the school as soon as possible to let the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children know.

**6. The Designated Teacher for Looked After Children**

The Designated Teacher ensures that there is a central point of contact within a school for all matters concerning children in care in that school.

Their job is to promote a child’s educational achievement with foster carers, social workers and other professionals.

They should make sure that the school’s policies about such things as homework and information about parent’s meetings are communicated to foster carers.

It is important therefore for you to make a good working relationship with the Designated Teacher as quickly as possible.

More information about the role of the Designated Teacher can be found in the statutory guidance in “The role and responsibilities of the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children” at [www.education.gov.uk/publications](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications)

**7. School admissions**

At the normal time of entry to a school, that is when starting school or transferring to a secondary school, schools are required to give the highest priority to children in care. This means that they get preference to other children and are guaranteed admission to their preferred school.

Outside of the normal admission round a Local Authority maintained school must admit a child in care if requested to do so, and the Local Authority with responsibility for the child can direct the school to do so even if it is full.

The Head of the Virtual School has responsibility for ensuring that these powers are used wherever necessary and also that transport is provided if it is needed to enable the child to stay at the same school.

There is much more information about school admission policies and appeals at: - [www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/schooladmissions/a00195/current-codes-and-regulations](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/schooladmissions/a00195/current-codes-and-regulations) .

**8. School absences**

It is expected that children in care will attend school every day for the whole school day, unless they are too ill or there are exceptional circumstances, such as a family bereavement.

The foster carer should contact the school as soon as possible on the first day of any absence to let them know that their child cannot attend, stating the reason. They should also keep their own record of all absences, which can be shown to the child’s social worker.

As with any parent, they should avoid taking the child out of school during term time for holidays, unless there are exceptional reasons for doing so. If this is necessary, it should always be discussed with the child’s social worker and head teacher or Designated Teacher for Looked After Children first.

Appointments with doctors and dentists should be avoided during school hours wherever possible. Similarly Children's Services should try as hard as possible to avoid arranging reviews and planning meetings during school hours.

We know that there will always be some children in care who will have problems with going to school. Foster carers should let the child’s social worker know as soon as any problems arise, so that actions to deal with them can be agreed. If there are longstanding problems with school attendance, this should be covered in the child’s Personal Education Plan.

**9. Supporting educational achievement**

The Children Act 1989 places a duty on Local Authorities to promote the educational achievement of children in care (with the exception of children who are receiving only short breaks). You can read what this means in the statutory guidance:

“Promoting the educational achievement of Looked After Children: statutory guidance for Local Authorities” at

[www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/Page1/DCSF-00342-2010](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/Page1/DCSF-00342-2010)

You should also read Children's Services’ education policy.

It has already been mentioned that foster carers have a crucial part to play in encouraging children in care to do well at school by providing them with somewhere quiet to study and materials and books, getting the child to join a library and supporting the school by attending meetings and parents evenings about the child, etc.

The Local Authority provides more formal support.

**10. Personal Education Plans**

These plans identify what needs to happen for a child to fulfil their educational potential. Foster carers and workers should be fully involved in the process of developing this plan and reviewing it. This gives you an opportunity to state what foster carer need in the way of help from the Local Authority to enable you to complete your tasks.

This may include money, for example, to cover the costs of enabling the child to take part in out of school activities or buying a computer. It may include any support you need in order to take advantage of a pre school place for your child. You should not be reticent in asking for any kind of help to enable your foster child to do well at school or broaden their education in a more general sense.

The plan should also cover the decisions that you can make yourself about your foster child’s education. In particular it should state whether you are able to sign the consent forms for school trips and other activities.

Essentially you should do, and ask for support in doing, everything that you would do for your own child’s education.

**11. Personal education allowances**

A personal education allowance of up to £500 may be available to support your foster child’s achievement. It should be used to prevent a child falling behind their peers in education or to help them catch up, if they are already behind. It can be used to buy support for learning that is not provided by the school, such as private music lessons, home tutoring or other out of school activities.

It should not be used to replace any services that schools, Local Authorities or carers already provide.

A decision to use a personal education allowance should be made at a personal education planning meeting. The child must be in agreement and sign the application form to confirm their assent.

The application should be sent to the Head of the Virtual School. The allowance will be reviewed at each review of the Personal Education Plan to make sure that it is still needed and the money is being used for the purpose it was intended.

**12. The Virtual School for Looked After Children**

The Virtual School for Looked After Children can be a useful ally. In addition to approving personal education allowances, the Head of it can ensure that a child in care is admitted to the school they want to go to and can set individual targets for children in care based on their previous performance.

The School can be contacted through your family placement social worker or the child’s social worker.

**13. One to one tuition**

All Looked After Children in mainstream schools must be offered one to one tuition. This is provided according to the needs of the child, but is used to help the child with Maths or English.

If your child has not been offered one to one tuition, you should raise this at the personal education planning meeting or review or raise it with the Virtual School for Looked After Children.

**14. Supporting young people leaving care**

A young person in care’s continuing need for education after leaving school should be considered and taken care of in the Pathway Plan. This will include what support is offered to maintain them in further education, higher education or training.

Each eligible care leaver is entitled to a bursary of £2000 when going on to study on a further education course, which is in addition to any other support that they might get.

**15. Exclusions**

Children in care are more likely to be excluded from school than other children because of their background of difficulties. Children can be excluded for fixed periods or permanently. The total number of days lost due to fixed exclusions should not exceed 45 days in any school year.

There is no such thing as an ‘informal exclusion’. Any enforced absence is an exclusion and should be recorded as such. Schools should be challenged if a pupil is sent home without any formal exclusion.

Foster carers should be notified immediately of any exclusion of a foster child, ideally by telephone and then a letter. The letter should specify the reasons for the exclusion, the period of exclusion and the date of return. Schools will normally expect to see the parents before the child returns to school and foster carers should expect to have to do this. However, you may wish to discuss this with the child’s social worker to decide who should do this or ask the child’s social worker to accompany you, if necessary. The purpose of any such discussion is to agree what needs to be done to make sure it does not happen again.

If the exclusions amount to more than 15 days in a term, the school governors must hold a Discipline Committee meeting to review the decision of the head teacher to exclude. Foster carers have the right to make representations to the Governors Discipline Committee when their foster child has been excluded. In the case of permanent exclusion the Committee can either agree with the head’s decision or recommend reinstatement of the pupil.

Permanent exclusion should be a last resort, following the failure of all other means to improve the situation. You should be involved in all the stages before this point is reached, so a permanent exclusion should not come as a surprise.

No child in care should be excluded from school without discussion with the Local Authority to ensure that there is some alternative provision.

Normally if a child is permanently excluded, the Local Authority has a duty to provide full time alternative education from the sixth day following the exclusion. However, if the child is in care, alternative provision should be available from the first school day following the exclusion.

Anyone who is seen as a parent (and this includes foster carers) has the right to appeal against an exclusion. If you are thinking of doing this you should discuss it first with the child’s social worker, so that any action the Local Authority may be thinking of taking can be coordinated. The appeal is made to an independent appeal panel if a permanent exclusion is upheld by the Governor’s Discipline Committee. You should submit any request for an appeal in time for it to arrive within 15 days of the Governor’s Discipline Committee’s decision.

You can find much more information about exclusions and appeals in the Government’s statutory guidance “Improving behaviour and attendance: Guidance on exclusion from schools and pupil referral units, 2008”, which you can read online at [www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/exclusion/a0076478/exclusion-guidance](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/behaviour/exclusion/a0076478/exclusion-guidance)

Note: Pupil Referral Units are now called ‘short stay schools’.

**16. Foster children with Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

Children with Special Educational Needs are those that have greater difficulty learning than most children of the same age. This may be caused by a range of cognitive, physical or sensory factors, emotional and behavioural difficulties, or difficulties with speech and language or social interaction.

Children in care are nine times more likely to have a Statement of Special Educational Need than the general population of pupils, so it is likely to be a significant feature of looking after children.

The responsibility for identifying children who are having difficulty learning rests with everyone who knows them – teachers, carers, social workers and family. When a need has been identified, additional resources and expertise are brought in to help such children in a step by step approach.

In most cases the school will take the lead in offering any extra help. It is usually a teacher who first raises any concerns. However, it is the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) who advises on and arranges any additional support. This is likely to come from extra resources within the school itself. Each child will have a plan with specific targets for improvement. These are reviewed regularly and you should be involved in this process. This stage is known as **School Action or Early Years Action**, depending upon the age of the child.

If there is insufficient progress, the child may need to move on to the next stage, which is called **School Action Plus or Early Years Action Plus**. Here the teachers and the Special Educational Needs Coordinator will consider a range of different teaching approaches, additional materials or computer programmes that can be used for specific problems. They may also decide that they do not have the right kind of expertise to deal with them and need to bring in expertise from other services, particularly the educational psychology service or Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS). These specialist services will undertake further specialised assessments, offer advice on strategies and in some cases give direct support to the child.

Even this may not work for a relatively small number of children, who then may need to move to the final stage, where a **Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Need** is undertaken. This is a detailed investigation, which brings together information from all the people and organisations who know the child, to find out what the needs are and what special help is needed. It will only be done if the school or early years setting cannot succeed using their own resources.

The school and anyone with parental responsibility for the child can initiate a statutory assessment.

If the result of the assessment is that additional resources are needed, the Local Authority will issue an **Initial Statement of Special Educational Need** that summarises the child’s needs and states what the Local Authority will provide to meet those needs. This could be services of a different kind or even a specialist school. If the parents accept the initial statement a **Final Statement of Special Educational Need** is then issued.

The whole process must be done within 26 weeks of the decision to start an assessment.

Foster carers have a key role to play in these assessments because of the information they have about the child. You should be asked automatically for your views during the assessment.

You should also be involved in any plans and actions taken by the school to meet your foster child’s educational needs. If you are not happy with what is proposed or what the school is doing, you can raise your concerns first of all with the Special Educational Needs Coordinator and share these with the child’s social worker too.

If you want any additional support or guidance, you can contact the **Parent Partnership Scheme**, which is set up to help parents with all matters concerning Special Educational Needs. It is an independent service that will assist parents and foster carers to resolve any disagreements about an assessment of their foster child’s Special Educational Needs and what is, or is not, being provided.

You can keep up to date with all the developments and news regarding Special Educational Needs by looking regularly at the Department of Education’s website at:- [www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/sen](http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/sen) . In particular you should be familiar with the Code of Practice, which can be found at: - [www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/sen/sen/guidance/a0013160/the-sen-code-of-practice](http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/sen/sen/guidance/a0013160/the-sen-code-of-practice) .

**End**