

PREVIOUSLY LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (PLAC) POLICY

(To be read in conjunction with the LAC Policy)

Aim

Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) at SAE will be supported to feel safe, confident and able to participate in all aspects of school life in order to reach their full potential, academically, creatively and emotionally.

The Steiner Academy Exeter (SAE) is well placed to support the care and development of previously looked after children and their parents. We have a unique curriculum that supports whole child development. The average age of children being placed for adoption nationally is 4 years. Many children therefore are facing the additional challenge of adjusting to their new adoptive family at the point at which they start school. At SAE formal education starts later when children are 6 years old which gives younger previously looked after children time to feel safe, form attachments and to be ready for formal academic learning. They are allowed to find themselves and develop socially. This also gives time for their parents, the school and other professionals to work together to find the best way to support the varying needs of these children. Children spend two years in kindergarten and then on transfer to class one stay with that teacher until the end of year 8. This means that children don't have to go through the additional trauma of a transition move to secondary school.

SUPPORTING ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Adoptive parents experience an exciting but rapid and demanding time when their children are first placed. Like all new parents they may find it hard adjusting to parenthood no matter how much they welcome the child's arrival. Unlike most other parents they may be very new to parenting at the time the child starts at their first/or new school. Schools have an important role in helping new parents understand and negotiate the educational system. As the adopted child progresses through the school positive attitudes and understanding from school staff will help promote their health and well-being, particularly if the long term impact of a child's very early experiences on their development and learning is recognised. The new parents should be treated and referred to as the child's mother / father as would happen in any other family.

Staff should remember that the child's situation is confidential and any discussions between school and adoptive parents, which may breach their confidentiality and that of the child, are held in private.

Staff and adoptive parents should aim to develop strong, **positive** and direct links as effective mutually respectful exchange of information about matters relating to pupils' education and well-being is essential, it is also a two way process. It should be born in mind that the school may not always be able to meet every individual need all of the time. Schools should know who to contact in case of emergency in some cases this may be the adoption social worker.

SUPPORTING ADOPTED CHILDREN AND THOSE PLACED FOR ADOPTION

Confidentiality is of great importance to the adopted child or young person, who may not want to be seen as different from their classmates.

A child who is placed for adoption remains a Child in Care until the adoption order is granted, and, if they are of statutory school age, will have a Personal Educational Plan (PEP). Statutory guidance -*The role and responsibilities of the designated teacher for Children in Care* makes it clear that the child should continue to be treated in the same way as any other Child in Care for the purpose of school admission priority arrangements and in relation to the designated teacher's role. Once the adoption order is made, the child is no longer looked after. The role of the designated teacher changes, not least because it is no longer a requirement for the child to have PEP. Schools and designated teachers will need to recognise that the child's educational, social and emotional needs will not change overnight because of the adoption order. At SAE the designated teacher will continue to support these children.

The designated (Children in Care) teacher in school will have information and advice about attachment difficulties which may affect an adopted child's behaviour. Children with a secure attachment will respond positively to other children, have good social skills, high levels of self-esteem, cope with setbacks and have independence skills. Where the child could not develop this attachment in their original family the child may exhibit difficulties in a number of ways, he/she may be over-anxious to please, desperate to do anything to escape rejection. They may withdraw and be unable to relate to either peers or adults. Their chaotic feelings could develop into chaotic behaviour. Unstructured time may be particularly difficult for the child, if this is the case supervision at breaks may be desirable.

WHAT ADOPTION CAN MEAN FOR CHILDREN

Sensitivity to difference in families will enhance the environment for all children in the school, (including Children in Care or those living with step-parent). Not all adopted children will be known to the school, if the adoption was some time in the past. The right environment can be created by an understanding of the different structures of families and different life experiences of individual children.

Some children who have been adopted from care may remain vulnerable to change and experience difficulties in new situations. Adopted children have all experienced loss - loss of birth family, at least one foster family, friends, their previous school etc. This can be quite overwhelming and can feel like rejection. This sense of loss can be rekindled at various times in their lives not just when they are first placed. Continuity and routine is important for adopted children and change can be very unsettling e.g. transfer to secondary school, or change of class or teacher. The structure of the curriculum and school means that children do not need to experience these transitions.

Playtimes can often be stressful due to their unstructured and unpredictable nature and adopted children can sometimes need extra help at these times.

'Time out' may not work effectively with a child who has not yet developed trust in adults. If this is the case an alternative means of support will be found.

The child may behave in a completely different way in school to how they are at home. For example as they begin to feel more secure in the adoptive family they could be dismissive, withdrawn or rejecting at home, but over friendly at school. This dynamic needs to be considered by SAE as an expression of attachment difficulties. Close liaison between home and school is vital in supporting attachment difficulties.

SAE staff should consider carefully what is included in the curriculum because of the following issues:-

- Adopted children have two sets of parents and may have brothers and sisters living elsewhere.
- Their birth family may still be a very real part of their lives through ongoing contact and this can be unsettling at times.
- Children may not have information or may not wish to write about family trees or personal biography.

- Photos and other keepsakes from when they were younger may not be available.
- A simple exercise like a family tree can be difficult for many children.
- Being required to make a Mother's day or Father's day card can be very traumatic or confusing for some children.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OR DISABILITY (SEND)

Young people with SEND will be treated as all children with additional needs, they will get the support they need as and when they need it. Some adopted children will achieve well at school while others may have special educational needs, be developmentally functioning at a lower age, and teachers need to be aware of possible short term memory problems, and consider strategies to address these. At SAE all previously looked after children with additional needs are on the SEND register and have ongoing Devon Assessment Framework My Plans (DAF2A). These are written in conjunction with the family, professionals, teachers and the child. There should be a review each term to ensure the needs of the child and family are being met. The DAF outlines what needs to happen for the child and teachers and staff should be mindful that programmes of support take place. If it becomes apparent that a higher level of support is necessary additional funds will be sought from the 0- 25 SEND Team (Please see SAE SEND policy and SEND Report).

WORKING WITH TEACHERS

The young person's teacher is uniquely placed to work with the young person to put support in place when needed. This may not be continuous but at such times as transition between lessons. They alongside the parents get to know the young person well. This means that they should endeavour to attend DAF or PEP meetings whenever possible as their input is essential for forward planning. It is important that the professional voice of teachers is heard. A mutually respectful dialogue is encouraged at all times.

KEY ADULT (GO TO OR COME TO PERSON)

Each child will have a designated person to support them within their setting. This does not mean that they have a personal teaching assistant on a one to one basis but a person who can offer support if necessary. This person may be selected for the child but in many cases the child will chose the person they best relate to.

AGE RELATED ISSUES

Adolescence can raise additional pressures for adopted young people, who may be more questioning about their past, at a time when they also want to fit in with peers, and seek independence from the known family. It is a time when their behaviour may change. It is crucial to keep adoptive parents involved in decision making regarding managing any behavioural issues in school.

WORKING WITH FELLOW PROFESSIONALS

The staff at SAE are open to working with professionals (Speech and language therapist, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, paediatricians, educational psychologists, etc.) to provide the best support for the young person. There will be times that the support is adapted to meet the Steiner curriculum/ therapeutic methods. We also reserve the right to use our own specialists such as eurhythmists, movement specialists, art therapists, drama therapists, etc.

PUPIL PREMIUM

All children who are adopted from care or special guardianship have an entitlement to pupil premium funding (PPF). This will be used to fund any additional support, i.e. for sensory breaks or movement sessions, resources, targeted support, trips, etc.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All staff must behave in a confidential and professional way when working with parents. Staff must not disclose to others (without permission) that a child has been adopted, it is up to the parent to decide to do this.

SAFEGUARDING

SAE has an important role to play in safeguarding all children. If there are any concerns about how the adoptive family is managing the child's welfare they should be discussed with the Children in Care Designated Teacher and Safeguarding lead. Serious concerns will be taken up according to safeguarding procedures in the usual way and if appropriate a MASH referral will be made.

RELATED POLICIES

Looked After Children (LAC)

SEND

Behaviour

Safeguarding and Child Protection