

12. Looked After Children Policy

Statement of Intent

Welford Pre-school is committed to providing quality provision based on equality of opportunity for all children and their families. All staff in our provision are committed to doing all they can to enable 'looked after' children or previously '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 (section 31), or have been accommodated by the local authority (a voluntary care arrangement, section 20). 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 have often 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.

Most local authorities do not place children under five with foster carers who work outside the home; however there are instances when this does occur or where the child has been placed with another family member who works.

We place emphasis on promoting *children's rights to be strong, resilient and listened to*. Our policy and practice guidelines for 'looked after' children are based on two important concepts: *attachment* and *resilience*. The principle behind 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 for 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.

Aims

- 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.
- We offer places for funded three and four-year-olds who are in care to ensure they receive their entitlement to early education.
- We will always offer 'stay and play' provision for a child who is two to five years old who is still settling with their foster carer, or who is only temporarily being looked after.
- Where a child who normally attends Welford Pre-school is taken into care and is cared for by a local foster carer, we will continue to offer the child a place.

Method

- Welford Pre-school's designated person for 'looked after' children is the Designated Safeguarding Lead, Sophia Hayward. Welford Pre-school's Designated Safeguarding Officer on the Management Committee is Ellen Worrell.
- Every child is allocated a key person once they start and this is no different for a 'looked after' child. The Designated Safeguarding Lead ensures the key person has the information, support and training necessary to meet the 'looked after' child's needs.
- The Designated Safeguarding Lead and the key person liaise with agencies, professionals and practitioners involved with the child and their family and ensures appropriate information is gained and shared.
- Welford Pre-school 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 Welford Pre-school 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. This plan is reviewed after two weeks, six weeks and three months. Thereafter at three to six monthly intervals.
- 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 their birth parent(s) and what arrangements will be in place for supervised contact. If this is to be at Welford Pre-school, 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 Welford Pre-school's activities that include parents/carers, 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/carers, unless otherwise agreed. It is even more important that the 'proximity' stage is followed until it is visible that the child has formed a relationship with their 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 form a whole picture of the child in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage's 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 in the child's file and reported to the child's social worker according to Welford Pre-school's Child Protection Policy (Safeguarding).
- Regular contact should be maintained with the child's social worker through planned meetings that will include the foster carer.
- Transition to school will be handled sensitively and the Designated Safeguarding Lead 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 if applicable.
- Where a 'looked after' child is potentially being moved to an adoptive placement, Welford Pre-school works closely with the child's social worker to support and facilitate the transition. This includes actively contributing to life story work and enabling meetings between the child and their new family. Welford Pre-school will do everything possible to ensure a successful transition.

Further guidance

- Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care (DfEE 2000)
- Who Does What: How Social Workers and Carers can Support the Education of Looked After Children (DfES 2005)
- Supporting Looked After Learners - A Practical Guide for School Governors (DfES 2006)
- LA support services – The Virtual School (01604 365912, <mailto:virtualschool@northnorthants.gov.uk>)

Date reviewed	21st February 2023
This policy was adopted at a meeting of Welford Pre-school held on	13th March 2023
	<i>E Worrell</i>
Role of signatory	Chair