

Looked after children

Policy statement

Chudleigh Pre-school is committed to providing quality provision based on equality of opportunity for all children and their families. All of our staff are committed to doing all they can to enable '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, or have been accommodated by the local authority (a voluntary care arrangement). 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 into 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 right 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 basis of this is to promote secure attachments in children's lives, as the foundation for resilience. These aspects of well-being underpin the child's responsiveness to learning and enable the development of 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.

Principles

- 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 at Chudleigh Pre-school 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 Chudleigh Pre-school is taken into care and is cared for by a local foster carer, we will continue to offer the placement for the child.

Procedures

- The designated person for looked after children is the designated child protection co-ordinator **Shanie Lang**.
- Every child is allocated a key person during their settling in period and this is no different for a looked after child. The designated person ensures the key person has the information, support and training necessary to meet the looked after child's needs, as with all children.
- The designated person and the key person liaise with agencies, professionals and practitioners involved with the child and his or her family and ensure that appropriate information is gained and shared.
- Chudleigh Pre-school recognises the role of the local authority children's 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 us, without prior discussion and agreement with the child's social worker.
- At the start of a placement there is a professionals meeting to 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 issues for the child such as:
 - their emotional needs and how they are to be met;
 - how any emotional issues and problems that affect behaviour are to be managed;
 - their sense of self, culture, language(s) and identity – and how this is to be supported;
 - their need for sociability and friendship;
 - their 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 his/her birth parent(s) and what arrangements will be in place for supervised contact. If this is to be at the setting, 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 our activities that include parents, such as outings and fun-days etc 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, unless otherwise agreed.
 - 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 picture of the whole child in relation to the settings curriculum.
 - 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 care worker according to the setting's safeguarding children procedure.
 - Regular contact should be maintained with the social worker through planned meetings that will include the foster carer.
 - The transition to school will be handled sensitively. The designated person 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.