

Looked After Children

Policy statement

Little Learners Nursery nurseries are 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 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 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 each child'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

- a) 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.
- b) We do not normally offer placements for babies and children under two years who are in care; we offer instead other services to enable a child to play and engage with other children while their carer stays with them.
- c) In exceptional circumstances, we offer places to two-year-old children who are in care. In such cases, the child should have been with the foster carer for at least two months and show signs of having formed a secure attachment to the carer, and the placement in the nursery will last a minimum of three months.
- d) We offer places for funded three and four-year-olds who are in care to ensure they receive their entitlement to early education. We expect that a child will have been with a foster carer for a minimum of one month and that they will have formed a secure attachment to the carer. We expect that the placement in the nursery will last a minimum of six weeks.

- e) Where a child who normally attends our nursery is taken into care and is cared for by a local foster carer, we will continue to offer the placement for the child.

Our Procedures

- a) The designated person for looked after children is the lead safeguarding practitioner.
- b) Every child is allocated a key person before they start and this is no different for a looked after child. The lead safeguarding practitioner ensures the key person has the information, support and training necessary to meet the looked after child's needs.
- c) The lead safeguarding practitioner 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.
- d) Little Learners recognises the role of the local authority children's social care department as the child's 'corporate parent' and as 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 the nursery, without prior discussion and agreement with the child's social worker.
- e) At the start of a placement a meeting of professionals takes place 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 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
 - how any special needs will be supported.
- f) 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 nursery, 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
 - with the social worker's agreement, and as part of the plan, the birth parent(s) should be involved in the nursery's activities that include parents, such as outings and fun-days etc alongside the foster carer.
- g) 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. It is even more important that the 'proximity' stage is followed until it is visible that the child has formed a sufficient relationship with the key person and for them 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.

- h) 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.
- i) Further observations about communication, interests and abilities will be noted to form a picture of the whole child in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage prime and specific areas of learning and development.
- j) Concerns about the child will be noted in the child's file and discussed with the foster carer.
- k) 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 children protection procedure.
- l) Regular contact should be maintained with the social worker through planned meetings that will include the foster carer.
- m) The transition to school will be handled sensitively. The lead safeguarding practitioner 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.

This policy meets the requirements of the Statutory Framework for the EYFS 1st September 2021.

Date policy last reviewed/updated	19 th November 2021	Reviewed by	Julia Ward, Quality Manager
Date of next review/update	November 2022		

