

# Fostering Policy and Guidance for Promoting Educational Achievement

**Document last updated:** September 2018

**Document review date:** September 2021



## About This Document

Title	<b>Foster care – Promoting Educational Achievement</b>
Purpose	<b>Policy and Guidance for the Fostering Service</b>
Updated by	<b>Rosemarie Cronin/Natalie Stephenson (Virtual School Head)</b>
Approved by	<b>Jenny Boyd, DLD Children and Families</b>
Date	<b>September 2018</b>
Version	<b>5.0</b>
Status	<b>Approved</b>
Review Frequency	<b>Three-yearly</b>
Next Review Date	<b>September 2021</b>

## Version Control

Date Issued	Version	Summary of Changes	Created by
September 2015	4.0	Update link to statutory guidance for promoting educational achievement to July 2014 version	Rosemarie Cronin
September 2015	4.1	Update terminology	Rosemarie Cronin
September 2015	4.2	Updated information regarding Pupil Premium Grant	Rosemarie Cronin
July 2018	5.0	Updated information regarding PEP Meetings	Rosemarie Cronin
July 2018	5.1	Updated training course names	Rosemarie Cronin

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## 1. Introduction and Legal Framework

**1.1** The Children Act 1989 and all the fostering legislation stress the importance of promoting education and achievement for all children who are looked after. Foster carers have a major role in this in supporting the children with their education within the home as well as being a good advocate for them within the education, employment and training environment. The statutory guidance 'Promoting the Education of Looked After Children (DfE) 2014 sets out the role and requirements of Local Authorities to support the education of these disadvantaged pupils.

**1.2** Fostering Regulations 2011 (Regulation 16) states:

### Education, employment and leisure activities

- 1) The fostering service provider must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster parents.
- 2) The fostering service provider must -
  - i) implement a procedure for monitoring the educational achievement, progress and school attendance of children placed with foster parents,
  - ii) promote the regular school attendance and participation in school activities of children of compulsory school age placed with foster parents, **and**
  - iii) provide foster parents with such information and assistance, including equipment, as may be necessary to meet the educational needs of children placed with them.
- 3) The fostering service provider must ensure that any education they provide for any child placed with a foster parent who is of compulsory school age, but who is not attending school, is efficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude, and any special educational needs the child may have.
- 4) The fostering service provider must ensure that foster parents promote the leisure interests of children placed with them.
- 5) Where any child placed with a foster parent is above compulsory school age, the fostering service provider must assist with the making of, and give effect to, the arrangements made for the child's education, training and employment.

**1.3** Standard 8 is about promoting educational attainment and states:

- 1) Children, including pre-school children and older children, have a foster home which promotes a learning environment and supports their development.
- 2) Children have access to a range of educational resources to support their learning and have opportunities beyond the school day to engage in activities which promote learning.
- 3) Children are supported to attend school, or alternative provision, regularly.
- 4) Children are helped by their foster carer to achieve their educational or training goals and foster carers are supported to work with a child's

education provider to maximise each child's achievement and to minimise any underachievement.

- 5) The fostering service has, and is fully implementing, a written education policy that promotes and values children's education and is understood by foster carers.
- 6) Foster carers maintain regular contact with each child's school and other education settings, attending all parents' meetings as appropriate and advocating for the child where appropriate.
- 7) Foster carers engage and work with schools, colleges and other organisations to support children's education, including advocating to help overcome any problems the child may be experiencing in their education setting. Foster carers have up-to-date information about each child's educational progress and school attendance record.

#### 1.4 The Fostering Statutory Guidance 2011 states:

##### Educational achievement

3.100 Although some do well, looked after children as a group are at greater risk of poor experiences of education and low educational attainment than their peers. As corporate parents, local authorities should demonstrate the strongest commitment to helping every child they look after, wherever the child is placed, to achieve the highest educational standards he or she possibly can. This includes supporting their aspirations to achieve in further and higher education.

3.101 The 1989 Act places a duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. This duty is set out in statutory guidance. The authority must give particular attention to the educational implications of any decision about the welfare of a looked after child. (The duty to promote educational achievement does not apply to children receiving short breaks, as in those cases the responsibility rests with the parent (regulation 42).

3.102 Continuity of education through avoiding changes of school can be a major factor in ensuring that children have the best opportunities to achieve. When placing a child, the responsible authority is under a duty to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable in all the circumstances, that the placement does not disrupt the child's education or training. Local authority fostering services therefore need to ensure that they recruit sufficient foster carers in locations which mean that school placements can be maintained wherever possible, unless the responsible authority has commissioned suitable placements from fostering agencies to meet such needs.

3.103 Fostering services must promote the educational achievement of children placed with foster carers (regulation 16 and standard 8). Whilst this duty does not apply in respect of children in short break care, foster carers should be mindful of the need to support parents in this task. Fostering services must have written education policies which set out how foster carers are supported to help ensure that children reach their full educational potential throughout their childhood and the transition to adulthood.

**3.104.** Foster carers and staff of the fostering service must be provided with the information and training necessary to ensure that they understand the challenges which looked after children face in fulfilling their maximum educational potential, and their role in helping to overcome these. They will require sufficient understanding of the education system to advocate on behalf of a child, to be the “pushy parent” where the child may be experiencing difficulties in their educational setting.

**3.105.** Foster carers should understand that supporting looked after children to attend school regularly and succeed in education are primary tasks. Such support includes, for example, helping the child with their homework and attending parent meetings where appropriate. They should be fully involved in educational planning and consulted to establish what help they need in supporting the educational success of the children and young people for whom they care.

**3.106.** The child’s care plan, through the Personal Education Plan (PEP), will identify what needs to happen for a looked after child to enable them to fulfil their potential, and should reflect any other education plans such as a statement of special educational needs or Individual Education Plan (IEP). Foster carers must be given a clear understanding of the local authority’s educational aspirations for the child and of the child’s own aspirations and be a source of regular support to encourage the child’s success in and out of school. They should be fully involved in educational planning for the children they foster, where appropriate alongside the child’s own parents. This will include attending any meeting held to draw up or review the PEP, or otherwise ensuring that their views are considered.

**3.107.** The governing bodies of all maintained schools and academies are required to appoint a designated teacher to promote the educational achievement of looked after children who are on the school roll. The role of the designated teacher is set out in statutory guidance. The designated teacher will ensure that there is a central point of initial contact within the school in relation to the education of looked after children, and that the school works closely with foster carers, social workers and other professionals to promote the child’s educational achievement. This includes making sure that school policies, such as timekeeping, homework and parents’ meetings, are communicated to foster carers. In this way, foster carers will be able to participate fully in supporting the school to meet the child’s educational needs.

**3.108.** Foster carers should be clear, in relation to each placement, what level of decision making has been delegated to them in relation to the child’s education, such as whether they are authorised to sign permission slips for school trips and activities.

**3.109.** The fostering service must support the responsible authority, in partnership with the foster carer, to draw up a placement plan for the child which identifies the foster carer’s role in supporting educational achievement. This will usually include day to day liaison with the child’s school, including attendance at parents’ meetings and responding to routine matters in accordance with arrangements for delegated authority to foster carers. In essence responsible authorities, fostering services and

foster carers should so far as possible do everything to support a looked after child's education that they would if the child were their own.

**3.110.** Fostering services and foster carers must work with the responsible authority to ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for monitoring school attendance and educational progress and achievement. Foster carers should be expected to notify the child's school of the reasons for any absences on the first day of such absence and, as with any child, should avoid taking a looked after child out of school during term time for holidays unless there are exceptional reasons.

**3.111.** Fostering services must ensure that foster carers are provided with all the information, support and equipment they need to fulfil their role in promoting educational achievement. Policies covering the payment of fostering allowances must make clear which costs carers are expected to meet from the allowance and any additional payments which may be available, such as for specialist equipment or extra-curricular activities.

**3.112.** Fostering services must ensure that foster homes provide suitable facilities for completion of homework, and that private study and reading support is valued by foster carers. Children should have access to a computer which may be used to support their education.

**3.113.** Early years provision can play an important part in helping young children to develop normal skills, and foster carers should be given maximum support to take advantage of a pre-school place where this is identified in the care plan or Early Years PEP.

**3.114.** For young people making the transition to adulthood, the PEP will be maintained as part of the preparation and review of the pathway plan and will identify the foster carer's role in supporting them through further or higher education, training or employment. This may include arrangements to fund a bed for the young person to return to during vacations if they are being educated away from the area of their foster home. The fostering service may support former foster carers to enable them to continue to work with young people beyond the age of 18.

#### **1.5** The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Guidance states:

**2.69** When a child becomes looked after the responsible local authority will arrange a suitable care placement. In doing so, the child's allocated social worker, supported by local authority management and resources, should do everything possible to minimise disruption to the child's education. This means maximising efforts to arrange a care placement which enables existing educational provision to be maintained where this is in the best interests of the child. Subject to age and understanding, it is important to seek the child's views about his/her education. Where a child is in Key Stage 4 (years 10 and 11) everything possible should be done to maintain the child in her/his existing school and a move should only be made in exceptional circumstances. Where it is impossible for the child to remain in his/her

existing educational placement the care placement should not, except in an emergency, be made unless the education provision is made at the same time.

**1.5.1** This document should also be read in conjunction with Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children – Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (July 2014 – updated 2018)

## **2. Essex Corporate Parenting Pledge**

**2.1** The young people of Essex said that they wanted to have opportunities to achieve and succeed. In response to this Essex have pledged to the children and young people that it will do its best to “Make sure you are getting the help you need with your education and learning so you can enjoy achieving the very best you can” and “Support you to take part in the things you want to do and that you have the information you need so you can make choices”.

**2.2** These parts of the Corporate Parenting Pledge are key and should be the foundation to the decision making for children and young people regarding their educational opportunities and leisure activities that they wish to be involved in. To ensure that children and young people are provided with these opportunities foster carers will need to work closely with schools as well as other relevant professionals working with the child or young person.

## **3. The Virtual School for Children in Care**

**3.1** The Virtual School for Children in Care has oversight for all Essex children in care from 3 years old through to 18. Raising the Participation Age requires young people to remain in education, employment and training until 18 years of age. These children may be educated or in further education, apprenticeships or training either in Essex, or outside of the county.

**3.2** Raising attainment and accelerating academic progress of children in care is a key responsibility of the Virtual School for Children in Care and their aim is to:

- Track progress and attainment working with schools and education providers to accelerate progression and improve educational outcomes.
- Improve attendance through monitoring attendance and reduce absence through early intervention.
- Work with social workers and carers to enable access to education through school admission.

- Work in partnership with schools and other professionals to reduce and prevent exclusion.
  - Resolve specific difficulties and remove barriers to education and learning.
- 3.3** The Virtual School for Children in Care works with other professionals to make sure all Essex children in care have an up-to-date Personal Education Plan (PEP) that is meaningful and of a high quality. All children in care between the ages of 3-18 should have a PEP that is reviewed three times a year. In Essex there is a joint approach to PEPs. Schools complete PEP Part 1 each term (ensuring three reviews a year) through the on-line tracking system CLA Tracker. Social workers are responsible for arranging and recording PEP Part 2 (the PEP meeting) which take place every six months unless there is a change of placement and/or school.
- 3.4** Foster carers are positively encouraged to contact the Virtual School for Children in Care if they have any concerns regarding the education of the children or young people that they look after. The Service also provides training for foster carers regarding the education of children that are in care.
- 3.5** The Service monitors educational achievement and attendance. If any issues are highlighted for a particular child then the information is shared with the fostering service.
- 3.6** The Virtual School for Children in Care has a [website](#) that can provide a range of information and resources that you may find helpful. You can also contact the Virtual School for Children in Care via [email](#).

## **4. Pupil Premium Grant Guidance for Social Care, Carers, Schools and Early Years Providers**

- 4.1** The Virtual School Head has responsibility for the Pupil Premium Plus for children in care. The purpose of the grant is to accelerate progress and raise attainment through the effective use of additional funding. There is a requirement for the use of the Pupil Premium Plus to be linked to the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- 4.2** Children in Care between the age of 3 years and one term to the end of school year 11 attract Pupil Premium Plus.
- 4.3** For children from 3 years and one term the Pupil Premium is linked to the number of hours of Early Years provision they access with a maximum of 15 hours a week. The full amount is currently up to £300.

- 4.4** For pupil between school year Reception to Year 11 schools are required to request Pupil Premium Plus through completion of the PEP part 1. The allocated amount is £1900 annually and is assessed and approved by the Virtual School.
- 4.5** Schools also have a duty to publish the use and impact of the Pupil Premium Grant on their website and are accountable for its use to Ofsted. The use of this grant should be discussed at the PEP meeting.

## 5. Personal Education Plan (PEP) Meetings

- 5.1** Every child in care from the end of the first full term after age 3 up to, but not including, age 18 must have a Personal Education Plan. This is part of the care plan that is reviewed through the statutory process by the Independent Reviewing Officer. Essex has a two-part approach to PEPs:
- 1) PEP1 is completed termly by school staff and includes detail of how well the child is doing, short and long-term objectives, what support is in place and, where appropriate, how the pupil premium grant is being used to ensure the child's attainment is maximized.
  - 2) PEP2 is the responsibility of the child's social worker. It is a record of the Personal Education Plan meeting which should be attended by the child (as appropriate to age and capacity), the carer, the social worker and the Designated Teacher for Looked-After and Previously Looked-After Children. The Designated Teacher can delegate attendance and actions to other members of the school staff but remains responsible for the school's input to the plan. There will be circumstances where it is also appropriate for birth parents and/or other representatives to attend. The Personal Education Plan meeting should be held wherever possible before the child comes into care or has to change school but in an emergency the meeting must be held within 10 days of coming into care. The plan must be scrutinized by the Independent Reviewing Officer as part of every statutory review of the care plan. PEP2 meetings are best held termly but, as a minimum, must not be more than six months apart. The information in PEP1 should be examined in PEP2 review meetings.
- 5.2** There are some differences for children in Early Years settings and for those in years 12 and 13. Much more detailed information on PEPs and wider information on supporting education can be found on the Essex Virtual School website.
- 5.3** Personal Education Plans should be ambitious and explicitly reflect the child's views.

## 6. Fostering Policy and Guidance

### 6.1 Assessment of Foster Carers

6.1.1 When potential foster carers are being assessed they are expected to be able to show that they have the practical skills, time and space to encourage the children and young people they look after to fulfil their educational potential. They will need to be able to be an advocate for the child or young person and be prepared to be a 'pushy parent' (Fostering Guidance 3.104) in seeking out the best way for the child or young person to receive the education they require. The expectations of carers will be discussed as part of the fostering assessment as well as ensuring that the carers do have enough space to allow a child to study quietly within the home.

### 6.2 Training of Foster Carers

6.2.1 The Virtual School for Children in Care provides training for foster carers regarding the education of children in care. One module (Education Matters – Introduction) is expected to be completed by carers within 12 months of being approved as carers (18 months for Short Break Carers). The second module (Education Matters – Advanced) is expected to be completed within 5 years of the first module.

6.2.2 In addition to this there is a Distance Learning Module which is based around the Fostering Network "Pathways through Fostering" Series.

6.2.3 There are also relevant training courses available online.

### 6.3 Expectations of Foster Carers

6.3.1 Foster carers play a vital part in contributing to improving the educational outcomes for children.

6.3.2 We expect foster carers to participate fully in the educational experience of children in care by:

- Ensuring that the home includes a space where the child or young person can sit quietly and study.
- Providing the time and opportunity for children to read to an adult carer each day (younger children).
- Giving lots of formal and informal opportunities to practice handwriting.
- Providing appropriate books and resources around the home.
- Supporting children's learning by helping to ensure that homework is completed and homework diaries are checked and signed each week, as required by the school (if foster carers are unsure how best to support homework, they should speak to the school link or contact the Virtual School for Children in Care).
- Ensuring that children have the right equipment and resources for learning e.g. stationery, calculator.

- Ensuring that the child or young person has access to a computer that they can use to support their education (also see Safe Use of Computers Policy).
- Making sure children attend school regularly and providing reasons for absence promptly to the school, when necessary. If carers are experiencing difficulties, they should speak to the education provider or contact the Virtual School for Children in Care.
- Attending parent consultation meetings and celebration events.
- Supporting the child or young person to attend appropriate after school activities and other leisure activities which contribute towards the child's learning and social skills.
- Making sure there is good communication with the school or education provider.
- Knowing who the Designated Teacher for Children in Care is at the school or education provider and be aware of the support they can provide.
- Ensuring that, if seeking a new school place, enquires to seek admission are with a good or outstanding school wherever possible.
- Celebrating educational achievements.
- Being aspirational about children's education and the importance of education in enhancing life choices and opportunities.

6.3.3 When a child or young person is placed with a foster carer the Placement Planning Meeting should be held prior to the placement or within 5 working days. As part of this meeting the delegated authority given to the foster carer will be discussed and this should include attendance at school events, signing of Home-School Agreements and permission to go on school trips.

6.3.4 The foster carer should ensure that they have the school term dates and any school closure dates for the schools attended by children in their care, to avoid arranging holidays in term time and to maximise school attendance.

6.3.5 Essex policy states that children and young people should not be taken out of school during school time unless there are exceptional circumstances. If this is required, agreement would have to be given prior to the arrangement. Foster carers would be expected to discuss this with the social worker of the child or young person and the supervising social worker. The circumstances would then need to be discussed and agreement given by the Director for Local Delivery in the area where the child or young person's social worker is based, who will consult with the Virtual School Head for Children in Care. **This should be agreed before any holiday is booked and authorisation sought from the Headteacher.**

6.3.6 Foster Carers are expected to attend the PEP meetings.

6.3.7 In most circumstances, foster carers are expected to transport children to and from school, unless the child or young person can go independently. If transport is required and the foster carer is unable to provide this for good

reasons, then a plan of arrangements needs to be put into place prior to the placement being agreed to ensure that the child or young person is supported in getting to and from school.

- 6.3.8 If your child or young person is experiencing difficulties contact the school or Virtual School early to seek help and support from the school.
- 6.3.9 If a child or young person is excluded from school, the carer should inform the SSW and the child's social worker immediately. Informal exclusions do not exist and if carers are told that this is the plan, they must again contact the social worker or the Virtual School for Children in Care immediately as this is not a legal process.

## **6.4 Children and Young People Changing School**

- 6.4.1 Continuity of education through avoiding changes of school can be a major factor in ensuring that children have the best opportunities to achieve. It is the duty of the responsible authority to ensure as far as reasonably practicable that the placement does not disrupt the child's education or training. If a change of school is required, this should be agreed as part of the care plan.
- 6.4.2 In Essex the School Admissions team can help in supporting this process. If a young person is at Key Stage 4 then no school change should be made without the agreement of the Director of Local Delivery in discussion with the Virtual School Head for Children in Care. Young people changing schools during their exam years may mean that they would miss out on opportunities to take exams if the schools do not follow the same exam board.
- 6.4.3 Foster carers should not agree to change a child or young person's school. This should be agreed by the social worker in line with the care plan for the child or young person. Where a child or young person has a Statement of Special Educational Need then there must be consultation and agreement from the Statutory Assessment Service. Any school move should be carefully planned to consider the child or young person's educational needs. It will be important to see what the school has to offer for that child or young person and to check OFSTED reports as children in care should only seek admission to schools judged by Ofsted as good or outstanding wherever possible.