

THE EDUCATION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Children of school age who are looked after must, unless there is a good reason, attend school regularly and should not be treated differently from other school-aged children. Children must not be kept off school for minor ailments or trivial reasons. Holidays should be taken in school holiday periods.

A child may be able to attend his previous school if you live sufficiently near. Often the Department will provide transport to enable the child to continue attending their own school or they may ask for your assistance. If this is not possible foster carers will be asked to make arrangements with their local school.

All schools will have a **designated teacher** for looked after children. Their role is to have an understanding of the needs of looked after children and to help them settle into school. You should get to know who the designated teacher is for each of the children in your care. Each looked after child should have a **Personal Education Plan (PEP)** that recognises that many looked after children experience disrupted education and need extra help to catch up with every one else. Speak to the designated teacher about the part you can play in a child's education. The PEP will always be discussed at a child's review of arrangements meeting.

Going to a new school is always an ordeal and children usually need for their foster carers to accompany them to school on the first day. You may want to help the child to rehearse what they will say to the other pupils when they are asked why they have joined a class. Some schools will identify other children to befriend a new comer and to show them round for the first few days.

It is wise to get to know the Head Teacher, the designated teacher for Looked After Children and the teachers at your foster child's school as they will then be better able to help with any difficulties if they know something about the child and your interest in them. Check with the child's social worker what information about the child and their history that you can share with the teaching staff.

Please ensure that someone attends parents' evening, school concerts and other school events. If the birth parent cannot go then you should attend.

Some children may need extra help and encouragement to achieve and not to see themselves as failures. Foster carers have an important contribution to make to a child's educational progress and development. They are in a good position to observe and notice if a child has difficulties in a specific area and to bring this to the attention of the child's social worker. Do encourage regular school attendance and try not to keep children off school for minor ailments. Promote education by reading to your child, listening to them reading, playing with them with interesting toys e.g. jigsaws, Lego, puzzles and construction kits.

Children in placement should be encouraged to develop and pursue after-school activities. Even if they are only with you for a short time you may be able to identify new interests that can continue on the child's return home.

Some young people however will have major and intractable school problems that will need senior staff from both education and social services to get together to identify possible solutions. To make this process run smoothly a PLACE panel (Promoting Looked after Children's Education) has been established. Foster carers will be invited to attend a PLACE panel if a child in their care is being discussed. More details about the operation of PLACE follow on from this section.

For young people over sixteen in foster care or residential care who wish to pursue higher education or training courses, resources are available to help. It is best to involve the child's social worker or leaving care worker early on in the discussion, as they will be able to advise on the resources that are available.