

Mitchell Walk Playgroup

Looked After Children Policy

Statement

Mitchell Walk setting is committed to providing quality provision based on equality of opportunity for all children and their families. All staff are committed to doing all they can to enable 'looked after' children in their care to achieve and reach their full potential.

Definition of 'looked after children' (LAC): Children and young people 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 LAC 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 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.

At Mitchell Walk, we place an 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 these two important concepts, attachment and resilience. These aspects of well-being underpin the child's responsiveness to learning and are the basis in developing positive dispositions for learning. For young people 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 do not offer placements to 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 where their carer stays with the child.
- We offer places to two-year-old children in exceptional circumstances 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 where the placement in the setting will last a minimum of three months.
- 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 has formed a secure attachment to the carer. We expect that the placement in the setting will last a

minimum of six weeks.

- We will always offer 'stay and play' provision for a child who is two to five years old and is still settling with their foster carer, or who is only temporarily being looked after.
- Where a child who normally attends our setting 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.
- Every child is allocated a key worker before they start and this is no different for a looked after child. The designated person ensures the key worker has the information, support and training necessary to meet the looked after child's needs.
- The designated person and key worker liaise with agencies, professionals and practitioners involved with the child and his or her family and ensures appropriate information is gained and shared.
- The setting recognises the role of the local authority social care department as a 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 the setting 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 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.
- 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 in the setting, when, where and what form of 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 settings activities that include parents, such as outings, 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. It is even more important that the 'proximity' stage is followed until it is visible that the child has formed a relationship with his or her 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 picture of the whole child in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage 6 areas of learning.
- 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 abuse is suspected, these are recorded in the child's file and reported to the child's social worker according to the settings safeguarding children procedure.
- Regular contact should be maintained with the social worker through planned meetings that will include the foster carer.
- Transition to school will be handled sensitively and 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.

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)

This Looked after children Policy was adopted at a meeting of Mitchell Walk Playgroup held on :

Date:

Signed on behalf of the Mitchell Walk Playgroup Management Committee:

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Name:

Role:

To be reviewed on (date):

This Policy was reviewed / updated on

Date:

Signed on behalf of the Mitchell Walk Playgroup Management Committee:

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Name:

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