



SOCIAL CARE, HEALTH AND WELLBEING SPECIALIST CHILDREN'S SERVICES

EDUCATION POLICY FOR CHILDREN ADOPTED FROM CARE

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Education Policy for children adopted from care

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1. Introduction

This policy aims to clarify responsibilities for Kent County Council's Education and Specialist Children's Services regarding support for children adopted from care.

'Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires commitment from many different organisations, professionals and individuals who have to work together to meet the needs for services for those affected by adoption.' (Kent County Council Adoption Statement of Purpose)

'Adopted children should have an enjoyable childhood, and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills, which in turn will lead to a successful adult life.' (Department for Education Adoption National Minimum Standards)

Education staff in schools, working in partnership with the child's adoptive parents will play a vital role in helping adopted children achieve positive outcomes in their education, as well as assisting in their social and emotional development.

It is estimated that a minimum of 1000 adopted children will be attending schools across Kent in any one year.

Adopted children share many characteristics with their non-adopted peers. However in common with other children who have experiences that have precipitated them coming into care, and prevented return to their family of origin, they can suffer from a similar range of emotional and behavioural difficulties. The All Party Parliamentary Group for Children in Care and Care Leavers has recommended that the Government looked closely as to how the educational needs of adopted children can be better and earlier assessed so as to provide them with the right support, educational and otherwise. Amendment has been made to the Schools Admissions code to ensure children adopted from care retain priority schools access from 2013, and adopted children will also be entitled to free early education from age 2 from 2014.

2. Policy Statement

The education and achievement of adopted children is to be actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood (Department for Education Adoption National Minimum Standards). This requires an effective partnership between the adoptive parent, the adoption agency and schools, which will be supported by Virtual School Kent (VSK).

Kent County Council has a specific responsibility to support the educational achievement of Children in Care. This will include ensuring that children are placed with adopters who demonstrate a high commitment to supporting their education. Prior to placement the Adoption Support Plan will contain a thorough assessment of the child's vulnerabilities, and current and possible future educational support needs. Where there are resource implications these will be considered by the Area Resource Panel, and consultation will take place with Education. For cross boundary Children in Care placed for adoption by other Local Authorities, any special educational needs should be raised with the Adoption Support Services Adviser.

Once the adoption order has been granted then the adoptive parent/s take on full responsibility for the child/young person, and in most cases will have no further contact with the child's original Social Worker, or their Adoption Worker. If they do then the Local Authority which was accountable for the child when they were in care remains responsible for adoption support for up to three years after the adoption order is granted. Following this period, then the Local Authority where the adoptive family resides becomes responsible (with the exception of financial support which continues to rest with the original Local Authority). Adoption support services in Kent are offered through the Adoption & Special Guardianship support team. This may include assisting and/or advocating regarding educational needs.

Adoptive parents will be strongly encouraged to use the Early Years Education Plan for Adopted Children (EYEPAC) or the Education Plan for Adopted children (EPAC), with the child's school when necessary.

3. School Admissions

In accordance with the Department for Education School Admissions Code all schools must have oversubscription criteria. Under the criteria any adopted child who was previously in care must be given the highest priority in relation to school admissions (i.e. the same level of priority as Children in Care, or former Children in Care subject to Special Guardianship or Residence Orders).

In addition to priority for adopted children, Kent County Council defines a sibling as a child living as brother or sister in the same house, including adopted children. The Local Authority recommends that where the admissions authority is the Governing body, they should take the same approach.

4. Early Years Provision

The free early education entitlement for two-year-olds will be extended to all adopted children from 2014.

5. Virtual School Kent

Kent County Council's Virtual School Kent will fulfil the following:

- Advise Social Workers on individual cases regarding the child's educational needs, as necessary.

- Contribute to the care planning for children including those who are placed or have a plan for adoption via the CIC Panels and planning meetings

When notified by Social Workers that the child has been placed for adoption, Virtual School Kent will:

- amend the Impulse system
- change the address
- receive the file from the old school:
- sort and send file to the new school:
- ensure transfer of records quickly and efficiently between schools

When notified by Social Workers that the Adoption Order has been granted:

- Close down the old record on Impulse, and take any of the steps above which have not yet been completed.
- Support the adoptive parents with specific difficulties relating to education
- Provide liaison with education departments outside of the County as and when appropriate.

Appendix 1 Information for Teachers – adopted children in school

Supporting adoptive parents

Adoptive parents experience an exciting but rapid and demanding learning curve when their children are first placed. Like all new parents they may have some problems adjusting to parenthood no matter how much they welcome the child's arrival. Unlike most other parents they may be very new to parenting at the time the child starts at their first/or new school. Schools have an important role in helping new parents understand and negotiate the educational system. As the adopted child progresses through the school positive attitudes and understanding from school staff will help promote their health and wellbeing, particularly if the long term impact of a child's very early experiences on their development and learning is recognised.

Always remember the child's situation is confidential and any discussions between school and adoptive parents, which may breach their confidentiality and that of the child, are held in private.

Schools and adoptive parents should aim to develop strong, positive and direct links as effective exchange of information about matters relating to pupils' education and well-being is essential and schools should know who to contact in case of emergency.

Supporting adopted children and those placed for adoption

The average age of children being placed for adoption both nationally, and in Kent, is 4 years. Many children therefore are facing the additional challenge of adjusting to their new adoptive family at the point at which they start school.

Transition to secondary school can be very challenging for some adopted children, in moving from a more nurturing environment to a larger and more complex physical environment. Adolescence can raise additional pressures for adopted young people, who may be more questioning about their past, at a time when they also want to fit in with peers, and seek independence from the known family. It is crucial to keep adoptive parents involved in decision making regarding managing any behavioural issues in school.

Confidentiality is of great importance to the adopted child or young person, who may not want to be seen as different from their classmates.

A child who is placed for adoption remains a Child in Care until the adoption order is granted, and, if they are of statutory school age, will have a Personal Educational Plan (PEP). Department for Education statutory guidance The role and responsibilities of the designated teacher for Children in Care makes it clear that the child should continue to be treated in the same way as any other Child in Care for the purpose of school admission priority arrangements and in relation to the designated teacher's role. Once the adoption order is made, the child is no longer looked after. The role of the designated teacher changes, not least because it is no longer a requirement for the child to have PEP. Schools and designated teachers will need to recognise that the child's educational, social and emotional needs will not change overnight because of the adoption order.

The designated (Children in Care) teacher in each school will have information and advice about attachment difficulties which may affect an adopted child's behaviour. Children with a secure attachment will respond positively to other children, have good social skills, high levels of self-esteem, cope with setbacks and have independence skills. Where the child could not develop this attachment in their original family the child may exhibit difficulties in a number of ways, he/she may be over-anxious to please, desperate to do anything to escape rejection. They may withdraw unable to relate to

either peers or adults. Their chaotic feelings could develop into chaotic behaviour. Unstructured time may be particularly difficult for the child.

What adoption can mean for children

Sensitivity to difference in families will enhance the environment for all children in the school, (including Children in Care or those living with step-parent). Not all adopted children will be known to the school, if the adoption was some time in the past, but the right environment can be created by an understanding of the different structures of families, and different life experiences of individual, even young children.

Some children who have been adopted from care may remain vulnerable to change and experience difficulties in new situations. Adopted children have all experienced loss – loss of birth family, at least one foster family, friends, their previous school etc. This can be quite overwhelming and can feel like rejection. This sense of loss can be rekindled at various times in their lives not just when they are first placed. Continuity and routine is important for adopted children and change can be very unsettling e.g. transfer to secondary school, or change of class or teacher.

Playtimes can often be stressful due to their unstructured and unpredictable nature and adopted children can sometimes need extra help at these times.

'Time out' may not work effectively with a child who has not yet developed trust in adults.

The child may behave in a completely different way in school to how they are at home. For example as they begin to feel more secure in the adoptive family they could be dismissive, withdrawn or rejecting at home, but over friendly at school. This dynamic needs to be considered by schools as an expression of attachment difficulties, and not necessarily as a consequence of poor parenting by the adoptive parents!

However schools have an important role to play in safeguarding all children, so if there are concerns about how the adoptive family is managing they should be discussed with the Children in Care Designated Teacher, or, if serious concerns, taken up according to safeguarding procedures in the usual way.

Schools should consider carefully what is included in the curriculum issues i.e. adopted children have two sets of parents and may have brothers and sisters living elsewhere. Their birth family may still be a very real part of their lives through ongoing contact and this can be unsettling at times. Children may not have information or may not wish to write about family trees or personal biography. Photos and other keepsakes from when they were younger may not be available. A simple exercise like a family tree can be difficult for many children. Being required to make a Mother's day or Father's day card can be very traumatic or confusing for some children.

Some adopted children will achieve well at school while others may have special educational needs, be developmentally functioning at a lower age, and teachers need to be aware of possible short term memory problems, and consider strategies to address these.

Appendix 2 Information for social workers – education issues and adoption

When adoption is being considered for a child the Child in Care Review will consider the child's educational needs. A full **Adoption Support Plan** should set out the child's educational needs for consideration by the Agency Decision Maker. The child's Social Worker must consult with education regarding any support needs the child has and may have post placement.

Consideration of adopters

A **summary of reports on the child's education** should be provided to any prospective adopters who are considering progressing to a match with a child.

Access to specialist educational advice will be given to prospective adopters, as necessary, when a match is being considered. The Virtual School Kent Assistant Headteachers will signpost to appropriate resources.

It is essential that agencies make available to the prospective adopter all **material facts** about the child(ren) that may be placed in their care. The information provided must include full details of the child's background. This includes educational progress (or difficulties), behaviour and comprehensive information about physical and mental health and development, and the implications for the future (Department for Education Statutory Guidance for Adoption & Children Act)

For children needing additional educational support; before presenting the proposed match to the Adoption Panel, the Adoption Support Plan should be updated and presented to the Area Resource Panel.

Planning for the adoption placement

The ICS flow chart: When a Child in Care is placed for Adoption (2) should be followed once the match has been agreed by the Agency Decision Maker to ensure that the Management Information Unit (MIU) is informed. MIU will take action needed to shield the record on ICS.

The **Adoption Placement Plan** needs to include consideration of the exercise of **Parental Responsibility** post placement regarding the child's education.

Whether the child is changing school or not, the child's Social Worker must **write to the current school** and any new school prior to the placement (with cc to VSK Adviser), and inform the adopter/s that this has been done. This will maintain the confidentiality of the placement and ensure that the necessary steps are taken regarding the child's records and the child is known by the correct name (depending on authorisation by the court). The Standard Letters to be followed are on Kent Trust Web Children's Directory.

Reviews under the Adoption Agencies Regulations will take place while the child is in placement, and will consider the child's education. Teachers and other educational professionals should be invited to the review.

The Adoption Order

Consideration of the child's **education and progress** should be contained in the Court Report for the adoption order.

Once the adoption order is granted then the school should be informed on the Standard Letter (cc to VSK Assistant Head) that the adopters now hold full parental responsibility for the child, and to remind the school to send the child's school file for amendment (if they have not already done so) to the VSK Assistant Head.

Post Adoption

If a contact is received from an adoptive family or child post adoption, in relation to support with Education then a referral should be made to the **Adoption Support Services Adviser** who will be able to advise and arrange an assessment for support, if necessary.

The Adoption Support Services Adviser assists prospective adopters and adopters through liaison with education and health services; across Local Authority boundaries and between departments within the Local Authority.

Adopters can request an Adoption support assessment when required which may include support for educational issues.

The Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) will liaise with Virtual School Kent, the education authority and individual school on behalf of any recipient of support services. The ASSA also is a key facilitator of joint working across Local Authority boundaries and between departments. They will ensure that the responsible Social Worker also manages any step down to tier 2 services.

Appendix 3 Information for prospective adoptive parents – adopted children in schools

Children are helped by their prospective adopters to achieve their educational or training goals and prospective adopters are supported to work with the child's education provider to maximise each child's achievements and to minimise any underachievement. Establishing relationships and routines pre-adoption will support better outcomes post order.

Prospective Adoptive parents should -

- Remember that young people in care may already be disadvantaged and that extra effort may be required to enable them to learn and participate in school;
- Find out who the Designated Teacher in the school of the child/ren is and ensure that they have made themselves known to the school.
- Liaise with the school regarding positive behaviour management as necessary
- Support children to attend school or alternative provision regularly .
- Attend Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings;
- Attend school functions, e.g. parents' evenings, sports days, functions etc.
- Ensure that the child is able to complete homework in suitable surroundings and with access to appropriate equipment;
- Ensure that each child has the relevant equipment and uniform to participate fully in school life;
- Encourage participation in out of school activities and interests;
- Celebrate the child's educational success as often as possible;
- Assist with reading, homework, projects and advise the school of any difficulties in this area;

Information:

- Meet with the schools and Designated Teacher to exchange information;
- Ensure that information about the child's daily educational progress is passed on to the Social Worker;
- Respond to letters and requests from school immediately;
- Keep the child's class/form/Designated Teacher informed immediately of events in the child's home life, which may impact on educational progress;
- Advise the school of absences and the reasons for those absences.

Decision-making:

- Attend planning meetings, review meetings and educational meetings and contribute to the development of the plan for the child/young person;
- Act as an advocate for the child/young person on matters such as change of school placement, implications of travel, exclusions.

Ensure that the following information is kept and updated on a regular basis:

- Personal Education Plan (PEP);
- Request the Education Plan for adopted children is completed with the school, as required, post adoption.
- School timetable;
- School reports;
- Record of attendance;
- Timetable of holidays;
- Homework timetable and expectations;
- Parents evenings and extracurricular activities

Appendix 4 References

[British Association for Adoption & Fostering has useful resources for professionals involved in adoption on their website](#)

[Supporting Families who Adopt \(Department for Education 2012\)](#)

[Understanding Why – Understanding attachment and how this can affect education with special reference to adopted children and young people and those looked after by local authorities \(National Children's Bureau\)](#)

[Child Welfare Factsheet](#) - information on parenting and teaching adopted children of primary school age (from American Departmental Website)

[Education Now \(Adoption UK\)](#)

[Kent County Council Adoption Statement of Purpose](#)

[Department for Education Adoption National Minimum Standards\)](#)

[All Party Parliamentary Group for Children in Care and Care Leavers](#)

[Department for Education School Admissions Code](#)

[The role and responsibilities of the designated teacher for Children in Care](#)

[Department for Education Statutory Guidance for Adoption](#)

[Department for Education Children's Act](#)