Education

Description

Education, training and employment

https://sparksfostering.org/wp-content/uploads/speaker/post-5488.mp3?cb=1727875717.mp3

Previous Page

Next Page

All foster carers and staff are required to have an understanding and appreciation for the value of education, training and employment, particularly for children in our care. As with all areas of support for the children we care for, Sparks Fostering staff and foster carers are expected to want the children to have the best start in life and to reach their full potential.

Sparks Fostering maintains a culture of high educational aspirations by helping children to reach their potential. Sparks Fostering supports all of the children in our care to attend school or other educational provision. Children are supported to learn and make good progress from their starting points. There is effective liaison with the school/college and the virtual school head.



Matching considerations

Sparks Fostering assesses fostering homes to ensure that all foster homes provide suitable facilities for completion of homework, and that private study and reading support is valued by foster parents.

When matching foster carers to children to be looked after, a key consideration is whether the foster carers could facilitate transport to the child's school. All feasible steps are taken to ensure that children are not expected to change schools when they move homes. Continuity of education through avoiding changes of school can be a major factor in ensuring that children have the best opportunities to achieve.

Delegated authority

Children's social workers are expected to provide details of 'delegated authority' as soon as possible after the child is placed, or at the latest at the Placement Planning meeting (within 5 working days of the placement being made). 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 or not they are authorised to sign permission slips for school trips and activities.

Supporting children

Children in foster care are supported with their education in the following ways:

- The **child's voice** is central to decisions made about them, including decisions about education. The child's wishes and feelings are taken into consideration when decisions are made by the adults who are responsible for the child's care. The child's views about their education are heard and considered by the foster carer(s), the supervising social worker, the child's social worker, and education staff.
- Foster carers complete appropriate reading and complete relevant **training** in order to improve their knowledge and skills in the education of children and young people.
- Foster carers facilitate and encourage regular **attendance and participation** in education activities. Transport to school within a 20mile radius and other standard education related expenses (that would be made by most parents) are included in the fostering allowance. If home tuition is required, this will be arranged by the child's social worker.
- Foster carers will inform school as soon as possible if the child is **unable to attend** school (or other education provision) for any reason.
- Foster carers maintain regular **contact with each child's school** and other education settings, attending all parents' meetings (including the PEP meeting), as appropriate and advocating for the child where appropriate.
- 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 ask for up-to-date information about each child's educational progress and school attendance record.
- Foster carers and the team around the child help the child to **navigate relationships** with peers

and teachers at school.

- Sparks Fostering works with the local authority and education staff to consider how the child's previous experiences, attachments and **emotional difficulties** impact on the child/ren's ability to engage in educational activities.
- Foster carers find a range of **educational resources** to support the child's learning and they give the children opportunities beyond the school day to engage in activities which promote learning.
- Some children in foster care may need additional support with their education. Sparks Fostering expects foster carers to offer to sit with children while they complete their **homework** and/or provide additional support when needed; appropriate rewards are given for effort made by the child.
- For children who need **support from a tutor**, this can be arranged by the children's social worker.
- Foster carers encourage children to engage in **extra-curricular interests** and activities and foster carers take children to appropriate clubs and classes.
- Foster carers are proactive in learning about the children's **specific needs** such as autism or dyslexia.
- Children who aren't able to attend mainstream compulsory education provision are provided **alternative provision** which is efficient and suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude, and any special educational needs the child may have. This is arranged by the child's social worker.
- Where any child placed with a foster carer is **above compulsory school age**, Sparks Fostering assists the foster carer to find suitable employment, training or education for the child.
- Sparks Fostering (the foster carers in particular) **celebrate the children's effort** in education. For some children it can be a great effort to make small achievement, so we focus on celebrating effort as well as achievements.
- There can be considerable **costs** linked to children's education, such as buying school uniforms, books, stationary, paying for school trips etc. The foster carer allowance includes these standard costs. Foster carers are expected to set aside a portion of their allowance to pay for these expenses when they arise.

Challenges for the children we look after

Although many achieve highly, children looked after as a group are at greater risk of poor experiences of education and low educational attainment than their peers.

Looked-after children are more likely to experience social, emotional and mental health issues than their peers. For example, they may struggle with executive functioning skills, forming trusting relationships, social skills, managing strong feelings (e.g. shame, sadness, anxiety and anger), sensory processing difficulties, foetal alcohol syndrome and coping with transitions and change. This can impact on their behaviour and education.



It is expected that schools are able to identify signs of potential mental health issues and know how to access further assessment and support where necessary; and schools should understand the impact that issues such as trauma and attachment difficulties and other mental health issues can have on children looked after, and are “attachment aware”. Foster carers and the team around the child work with the child to address these issues.

The children’s social worker also works alongside the Virtual School Head (see below) to consider how to work effectively in partnership with health agencies to support wellbeing and, in turn, educational attainment. This could be through use of an educational psychologist, or by exploiting any single points of contact that have been established within the local children and young people’s mental health service.

It is important to have a means of regularly measuring the emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by children looked-after; the children’s social worker may have a formal assessment (such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) for this work. Foster carers and their supervising social workers update the relevant information on the Sparks Fostering recording templates.

Finding new school placements

If it is not possible to maintain the child’s existing education placement, the child’s new education placement should be arranged at the same time as the care placement. In the case of an emergency placement, the authority that looks after the child should secure a suitable new education placement within 20 school days.

The Virtual School Head (see below) is responsible for supporting social workers to ensure timely provision of a suitable education placement for looked-after children. There should also be appropriate consultation with the Virtual School Head in another local authority where out-of-authority placements are planned and made.

When arranging a school placement, the child’s social worker (working with the Virtual School Head and the other local authority staff, where appropriate) should seek a school or other education setting that is best suited to the child’s needs. That could be in a maintained school, academy or independent school, and those schools could be selective, non-selective, boarding or day schools. It might also, in some cases be appropriate to place a child in a special school or alternative provision.

Admissions authorities of all mainstream schools must give the highest priority in their over-subscription criteria to looked-after and previously looked-after children, as defined in the School Admission Code.

If the appropriate placement is at a mainstream academy or maintained school, the children’s social worker will work with the foster carer to apply through the same process as other parents.

The following principles should also apply:

- Educational provision should mean a full-time place.
- Schools judged by Ofsted to be ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ should be prioritised when seeking places for looked-after children in need of a new school. Unless there are exceptional evidence-based

reasons, looked-after children should never be placed in a school judged by Ofsted to be ‘inadequate’. When consideration is given to schools judged ‘requiring improvement’, Virtual School Heads and social workers should have evidence that the school is providing high quality support to its vulnerable pupils, and will enable a looked-after child to make maximum progress before placing them in that school.

- The choice of the education setting should be based on what any good parent would want for their child. It should be based on evidence that the setting can meet the educational needs of the child and help them make maximum progress.
- The child’s wishes and feelings should be taken into account, and the suitability of the education setting tested by arranging an informal visit with the child. Where a looked after child would benefit from attending a boarding school, either in the state or independent sector, Virtual School Heads and social workers should be proactive in considering this option.
- Early years provision can play an important part in helping young children to develop normal skills, and foster carers are given maximum support to take advantage of a pre-school place where this is identified in the care plan or early years PEP.

Home Schooling

Home schooling is discouraged for children in fostering homes. The main reason being that schools offer additional safeguarding oversight; but also, mainstream education can offer additional opportunities for socialisation and can offer continuity of care for some children.

Some children may not be able to attend school for a period of time because they are unsettled and aren’t able to emotionally cope with another transition; for those children a home tutor will be arranged by the child’s social worker and a slow, structured introduction to school would be planned.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

All young people in care must have a current Personal Education Plan (PEP), which should be reviewed 3 times a year. The PEPs should be initiated as part of the care plan. It is an evolving record of what needs to happen for looked-after children to enable them to make at least expected progress and fulfil their potential. The PEP should reflect the importance of a personalised approach to learning that meets the child’s identified educational needs, raises aspirations and builds life chances. The school, other professionals and the child’s carers should use the PEP to support achieving those things. Where a child is placed in an emergency, the PEP is initiated within 10 working days of their becoming looked-after, wherever they are placed.

Looked-after children and previously looked-after children are significantly more likely to have Special Educational Needs (SEN) than their peers. Of those with SEN, a significant proportion will have Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC plans). Children are assessed for SEN if they have emotional and behavioural difficulties; cognitive difficulties (understanding, processing and learning); trouble with speech, language and communication; or sensory or physical difficulties (including medical conditions and visual or hearing impairments).

The children’s social worker, Virtual School Head, designated teacher and/or other education staff will lead on organising and chairing PEP/EHCP meetings. The foster carer and Sparks Fostering social worker will ensure that any information required to support children is acquired and recorded at the

meetings. Sparks Fostering templates should be updated at the meetings, particularly in relation to recording the education plans for the children. **There can sometimes be a delay in receiving minutes from multi-agency meetings, so it is important that the foster carer takes notes (and a record of the plan) during the meetings, and that these are uploaded to the child's records in a timely manner.**

Virtual School Head, SENCOs and designated teachers

Designated teachers: All maintained schools, academies and Free Schools are required to appoint a designated teacher to champion the educational attainment of looked-after and previously looked-after children, and act as a source of information and advice about their needs. 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 parents, 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 parents. In this way, foster parents will be able to participate fully in supporting the school to meet the child's educational needs.

SENCOs: The Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), in collaboration with the head teacher and governing body, plays an important role in determining the strategic development of the SEN policy and provision in the school in order to raise the achievement of children with SEN.

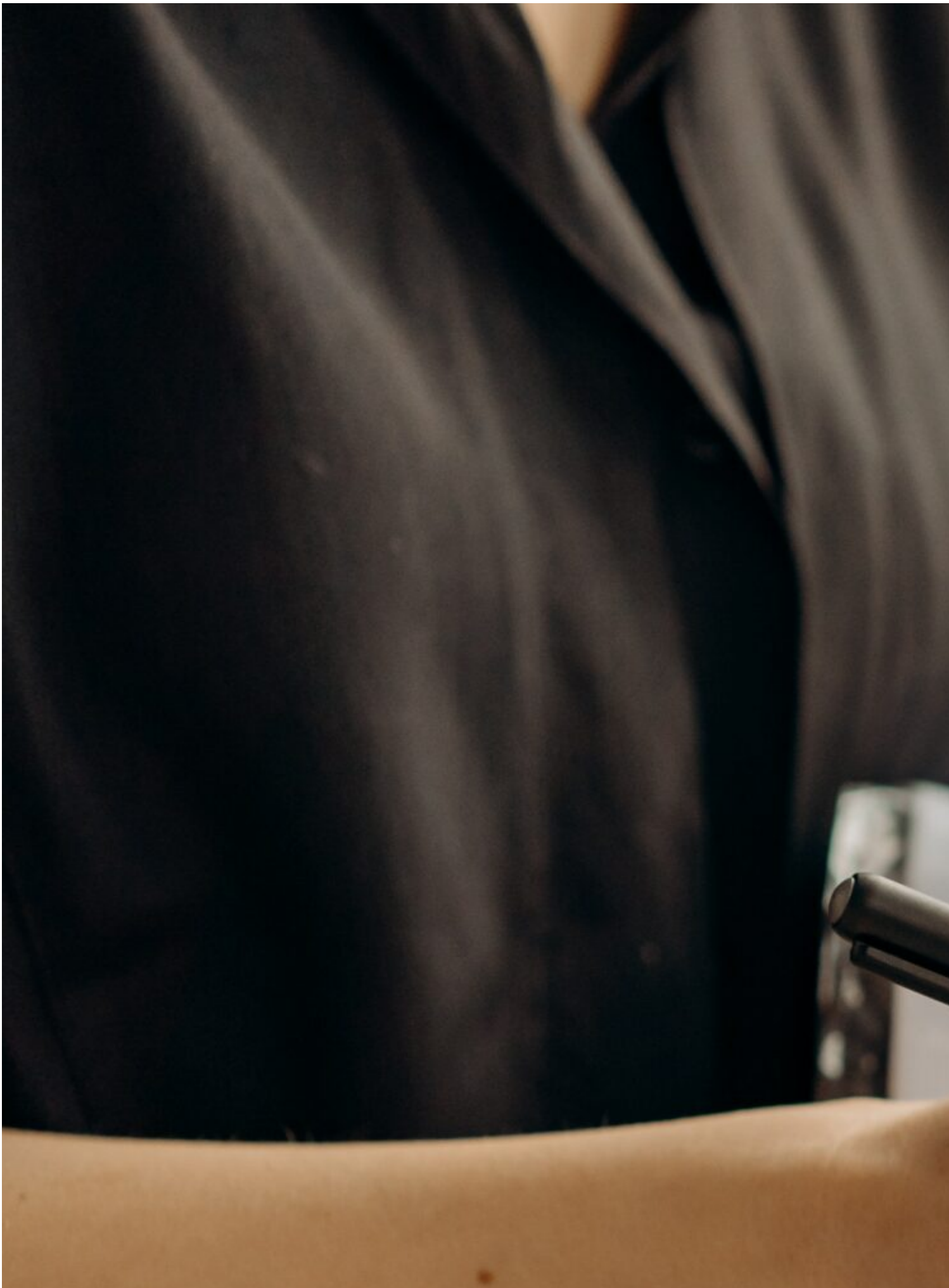
Virtual School Heads: VSHs should ensure the educational attainment and progress of children looked after by the local authority are monitored and evaluated as if those children attended a single school. The VSH should be the lead responsible officer for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of the authority's looked-after children, including those placed out-of-authority.

The VSH should ensure that there are appropriate arrangements in place to meet the training needs of those responsible for promoting the educational achievement of looked-after and previously looked-after children. This may include themselves as VSH, carers, designated teachers, other school staff, social workers and IROs. Supervising social workers may wish to ask the Virtual School Head for any children in placement if there is training available for foster carers and supervising social workers.

Pupil premiums

Children who are looked after are entitled to additional funding to support the targets or outcomes set out in their Personal Education Plans (PEPs). This is called Pupil Premium Plus and is administered by the Headteacher of the Virtual School. In 2022, children who have been in local authority care for 1 day or more attracted £2,345 of pupil premium funding.

VSHs are also responsible for managing the early years pupil premium (EYPP). They are in charge of giving the premium to the early years providers that educate children looked after, who are taking up the free early education entitlement for 3- or 4-year-olds.



School exclusion

Where a child is at risk of or has been given a fixed-term or permanent exclusion, the Virtual School Head, working with others, should:

- Consider what additional assessment and support (such as additional help for the classroom teacher or one-to-one therapeutic work) needs to be put in place to help the school address the causes of the child's behaviour and prevent the need for exclusion.
- Make any additional arrangements to support the child's on-going education in the event of an exclusion. Where a child has been permanently excluded, this will include rapidly securing new educational provision in line with the child's needs and PEP.

Asylum seeking and refugee (separated) children

An unaccompanied/separated child looked after by a local authority is entitled to the same local authority support as any other looked after child: to have a safe and stable placement; to receive the care that they need to thrive; and the support they need to fulfil their educational and other outcomes. Some unaccompanied/separated children who have recently arrived in the country may never have had access to education before.

Appropriate education for unaccompanied children may include a period of time in a setting where their full educational needs can be assessed and integrated into the PEP. They may need time to be prepared for and then become used to formal education, and their initial educational outcomes may include cultural orientation and life skills appropriate to their age. Virtual School Heads, Independent Reviewing Officers, school admission officers and Special Educational Needs departments should work together to ensure that appropriate education provision for the child is arranged at the same time as a placement.

Relationships and sex education (RSE)

Schools are legally required to teach relationships and sex education. Schools may also invite foster carers to attend briefing sessions about their RSE curriculum. Foster carers are expected to engage in the school's curriculum and work with the school and children's social worker to determine what is appropriate for the child, depending on their needs and developmental stage.

The child's care plan may include decisions about how to support the child in their relationship and sex education. Special consideration should be given to children who are preparing to leave care, when they will have less support and oversight of their relationships. Also, the increased vulnerability of children in care should be considered when teaching them about how to stay safe and build appropriate relationships.

Transition to adulthood

The duty to promote the educational achievement of a looked-after child extends to looked-after young people aged 16 or 17 preparing to leave care. These are referred to in the Children Act 1989 as 'eligible children'. The PEP is maintained as part of the preparation and review of the pathway plan and

builds on the young person's educational progress.

For those between 16 – 18 years, VSH should liaise with the young person's Personal Adviser during the initial transition to leaving care services to ensure the adviser understands the young person's educational goals and support needs. The foster carer should also be involved in these discussions.

The pathway plan and PEP for eligible children will identify the foster parent'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. Sparks Fostering is able to support foster carers to enable them to continue to work with young people beyond the age of 18, as part of the child's 'staying put' arrangements.

Each eligible care leaver should be informed about the : Each eligible care leaver receives a higher education bursary when going on to study a recognised Higher Education course, and arrangements for the payment of the bursary are agreed by the young person as part of the overall package of support that a local authority provides to its care leavers.

Recordings

Clear and detailed recordings are integral to providing good care for children we look after. Recordings include: details and contact information for the education provision and all professionals who are part of the team around the child; important dates with details (e.g. start dates, absences, parent conferences, significant incidents etc.); a copy of the PEP/EHCP; progress and work done towards meeting the targets set in the PEP/EHCP; any other relevant and regular updates.

Case Study

A boy in Year 1 who had lots of potential, but his behaviours were stopping him from learning. This was his third school in one year due to placement moves. He had only been in school part-time and needed constant supervision due to absconding and dangerous behaviour. His primary school was concerned that they could not meet his needs, especially as there seemed to be no triggers for his behaviour and he was very erratic.

The solution: –

Partnership working – school, social worker, foster carers, Virtual School Co-ordinator and Virtual School Mentor, behaviour support, district inclusion officer, educational psychologist. The team had regular high quality personal education planning meetings where advice and guidance was thoroughly explored and robustly implemented. This team gave a strong sense that everyone was committed to the young person and was prepared to always go the extra mile to support him.

Voice of the child – the young person was involved in designing his own safe space and was able to use it when he felt overwhelmed and anxious. Over time he used it less and less and eventually he volunteered for it to be used as the space for a new school mascot instead.

How was the pupil premium used – 1 to 1 teaching assistant support; individual and whole school attachment and trauma training and letterbox in the home.

Aspiration – To support the pupil to regulate his behaviour so that he could increase his time in school and make the progress in attainment that he was capable of achieving.

Outcome – He is now in school full-time and permanent exclusion has been avoided. He is a popular member of the class and is making good relationships. He is starting to fill in the gaps in his education and is engaging in learning at home, something that he would not have done previously. He is now very much a part of his new foster family and they have confidence to go out and experience new things together.

additional Resources (optional)

ATTENDING EDUCATION PROVISION

Children who 'skip' school – Advice from Action for Children

Emotional based school avoidance (EBSA) – an article by ACAMH

If the child is refusing to go to school – Advice from Action for Children

My daughter couldn't go to school: What I wish I had known. By Young Minds

Preparing for a new school term – Advice from Action for Children

Podcast: Talking about attendance – Dame Rachel de Souza, Children's Commissioner for England visited Newman Catholic College in North London to talk to a group of pupils who have had difficulties with attendance in the past and who have started tackling being in school with the help of the school and it's staff.

Supporting children at university – Advice from Action for Children

Why is school attendance so important and what are the risks of missing a day? by 'The Education Hub'

CHILD DEVELOPMENT AT DIFFERENT AGES & STAGES

'CDC's Developmental Milestones' – the Centre for Disease Control provides information to help parents and carers to determine if there are indicators of developmental delay. The website also has a link to a 'Milestone Tracker'.

The Australian Parenting Website gives information about how to meet the needs of children of different age groups. The site has well presented comprehensive information, including short videos.

The website for 'The Children's Hospital of Orange County' (US) has a useful summary of what is typically expected of children at each age group.

DEVELOPING SPEECH AND LITERACY

Blah blah blah Phonics Card Game

Communication milestones for young children: Speech and language. From Action for Children.

Improving language skills – Advice from Action for Children

Improving reading skills – Advice from Action for Children

Reading Eggs makes learning to read interesting and engaging for kids, with great online reading games and activities.

Reading with your child – Tips and video from Family Lives

Speech and language milestones – Advice from Action for Children

Speech delay – Advice from Action for Children

Teaching new words – Advice from Action for Children

What does it mean if my child's speech is delayed? A short article with tips from Action for Children.

HOME LEARNING

Acorn Digital Learning: Acorn Digital Learning is leading the way for online schooling, embracing its unique status as an alternative provider for a diverse group of children and young people; specifically looked- after children, youngsters who may have been out of education for some time and others with additional learning needs or identified barriers to learning.

Atom Learning – Self-directed learning to help children with 11+ exams.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Complete SEND Diploma – 15 hour online course for £25 by 'New Skills Academy'

Love life: resources for young people with learning difficulties. By the NSPCC.

Safeguarding children with special educational needs (SEND). By NSPCC.

The SEND Network Podcast. A collection of podcasts.

TESTS AND EXAMS

Helping children with exam stress – advice from Action for Children

Supporting children with exam results – advice from Action for Children

MISC

101 ideas for supporting your child's development. A blog on the 'Positive Parenting Project' website.

Education Endowment Foundation is an independent charity which provides a range of resources to support children in education.

Education: learning from serious case reviews. NSPCC briefing.

How can I get the right support for my child's educational needs? Tips from Action for Children.

Information about schools' RSE curriculum – FAQs by the government about the RSE curriculum

The 'Propel' website is a resource for those considering further and higher education. It contains information about the support that's available to care leavers at UK colleges and universities throughout the UK, plus advice on funding, applications and inspiring stories from other care-experienced students.

School gate culture – Advice from Family Lives about coping with school gate culture.

Travelling to and from school – Advice from Family Lives about how and when to support children to travel to school independently

Unite Foundation Scholarship offers accommodation and bills covered for up to 3 years at university. That includes all through the holidays too.

Using questions to support learning – Action for Children advice about how to use questions to help children improve their thinking skills.

What is an EHCP and an IEP, and how can I get my child one? From Action for Children.

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user