**Tring Stepping Stones Pre-School**

**Looked after children**

**Policy statement**

Early years settings are 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.

A 'Looked after Child' is a child in public care, who is placed with foster carers, in a residential home or with parents or other relatives.

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 in to the 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 impact on their emotional well-being.

At Tring Stepping Stones we place 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.* The basis of this is to promote secure attachments in children’s lives as the basis for 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 children 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, the term is never used to categorise a child as standing out from others. We do not refere to such a child using acronyms such as LAC.
* On the child’s 1 hour visit to pre-school the carer completes the registration documentation including an additional form for Looked After Children, pre-school must be informed at this stage who is allowed access to the child and who should not have access. All staff should be made aware of access rights immediately to ensure the child is not contacted or collected from pre-school by anyone who is not allowed access.
* Tring Stepping Stones will offer funded places to two, three and four-year-old children following necessary checks for eligibility of funding and availability of space. In such cases, the child should be settled with their foster carer.
* Tring Stepping Stones will always be flexible with our settling in period, we will work together with the child, foster carer and social worker to ensure that we meet their individual needs, aiming to make their stay at our pre-school a happy one. It would be even more important to ensure that the child has formed a good relationship with their key person to allow gradual separation from the foster carer. We could offer ‘stay and play’ provision and help look for other suitable activities through the local Family Centre for a child who is two to five years old and who is still settling with their foster carer, or who is only temporarily being looked after.
* Where a child who normally attends Tring Stepping Stones 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 pre-school leaders who are our designated child protection co-ordinators.
* Every child is allocated a key person before they start and this is no different for a looked after child. The designated person ensures the key person has the information, support and training necessary to meet the looked after child’s needs.
* The designated person and the key person liaise with agencies, professionals and practitioners involved with the child and his or her family and ensures appropriate information is gained and shared.
* Tring Stepping Stones recognises the role of the local authority social care department as the child’s ‘corporate parent’ and the key agency in determining what takes place with the child. Nothing changes, especially with regard to the birth parents or foster carer’s role in relation to the setting without prior discussion and agreement with the child’s social worker. To ensure this we do require the full contact details for the child’s social worker at the 1 hour visit so we are able to contact the virtual school prior to the child starting with us. Ideally, we would meet with the child’s social worker prior to them starting with us however if this is not possible, we do require a meeting within the first two weeks of the child starting at pre-school and we should make this known to the foster carer when they are enquiring about a place at pre-school for the looked after child.
* At the start of a placement or preferably before there is a professionals meeting that will determine the objectives of the placement and draw up a care plan that incorporates all the child’s learning needs this plan is reviewed at regular intervals as agreed with professionals. 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:

 - who will have responsibility for completing the registration form on the child’s 1 hour visit at pre-school;

 - 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. This should include information such as parent/carer information letters, parent consultations, learning journeys and general updates on the child’s progress. It should include whether the birth parent should be included in all of the above along with the foster carer, excluded or copied in~~;~~

- 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 the setting, when, where and what form the contact will take will be discussed and agreed. Access rights should be discussed and documented on the child’s registration form so that pre-school is aware who can collect the child from pre-school

- 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; and with the social worker’s agreement, and as part of the plan, the birth parent(s) should be involved in the setting’s activities that include parents, such as outings, fun-days etc alongside the foster carer.

* The settling-in process of 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 sufficient relationship with his or her key person for them to act as a ‘secure base’ to allow gradual separation from the foster carer. This process may take longer in some cases, so time needs to be allowed for t 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 3 prime areas and 4 specific areas of learning.
* Concerns about the child will be noted in the child’s file and discussed with the foster carer.
* A log will be kept in the current SEN file of all contact with other professionals and the outcome of each contact
* If the concerns are about the foster carer’s treatment of the child, or if abuse is suspected, these are recorded in the child’s file and reported to the child’s social care worker according to the setting’s safeguarding children procedure.
* **Additional Support**
* The designated person and key person liaise with agencies and professionals involved with the child, and his or her family, and ensure appropriate information is gained and shared.
* A meeting of professionals involved with the child is convened by the setting at the start of a placement. A Personal Education Plan (PEP) for children over 3 years old is put in place within 10 days of the child becoming looked after.
* Following this meeting, 6.8a Care plan for looked after children form is completed. The care plan is reviewed after two weeks, six weeks, three months, and thereafter at three to six monthly intervals.
* Regular contact should be maintained with the social worker through planned meetings which will include contribution to the PEP which is reviewed annually.
* 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 child’s social worker as detailed in the care plan.

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| This policy was adopted by | Tring Stepping stones Pre-School |  |
| Via email on: |  |  |
| Date to be reviewed | April 2025 |  |
| Signed on behalf of the management committee |  |  |
| Name of signatory |  |  |
| Role of signatory (e.g. chair/owner) |  |  |

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| --- | --- | --- |
| staff name  | sign when the policy has been read | date  |
| Nicola Poulton |  |  |
| Lucy Brittain |  |  |
| Nicola Reynolds |  |  |
| Kim Smith |  |  |
| Jo Davis  |  |  |

Changes:Tring Stepping Stones will offer funded places to two-year-old children following necessary checks for eligibility of funding and availability of space.Changed from 6 areas of learning to 3 prime and 4 specific areas of learning. TSS recognising role of local authority - To ensure this we do require the full contact details for the child’s social worker preferably before the child starts at pre-school, on the first day or definitely within the first two weeks of the child joining pre-school.We have been less specific about the time a child needs to be with a foster carer and have not stated a minimum period for their placement as following correspondence with Virtual School and Jane Osburn we have changed it to being settled and to meet the needs of the individual child.July 2014 – added 1 hour visit prior to start date & contact details for social worker required at 1 hour March visit

March 2015 – changed meeting to take place with social worker with two weeks rather than four weeks of start date. Changed who is to complete registration form during 1 hour visit rather than first day.

May 2017 Additions to page 3 wherever possible, and where the plan is for the child’s return home, the birth parent(s) should be involved in planning; and with the social worker’s agreement, and as part of the plan, the birth parent(s) should be involved in the setting’s activities that include parents, such as outings, fun-days etc alongside the foster carer. The settling-in process of 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 sufficient relationship with his or her key person for them to act as a ‘secure base’ to allow gradual separation from the foster carer. This process may take longer in some cases, so time needs to be allowed for t to take place without causing further distress or anxiety to the child.

May 2018- no change

June 2019 – transition to school records handed over with the agreement of the childs social worker

April 2020 no changes

March 2022

**Additional Support**

* The designated person and key person liaise with agencies and professionals involved with the child, and his or her family, and ensure appropriate information is gained and shared.
* A meeting of professionals involved with the child is convened by the setting at the start of a placement. A Personal Education Plan (PEP) for children over 3 years old is put in place within 10 days of the child becoming looked after.
* Following this meeting, 6.8a Care plan for looked after children form is completed. The care plan is reviewed after two weeks, six weeks, three months, and thereafter at three to six monthly intervals.
* ”meetings with social workers which will include contribution to the PEP which is reviewed annually.”

April 2023 – changed definition of a looked after child as per the updated Early Years Alliance policy

April 2024 – updated staff list