

Policy Statement on the Education of Hertfordshire Children Looked After living in Foster Care

September 2025

Note: The terms 'children' and 'Children Looked After' in this policy statement includes children of all ages up to the age of legal adulthood (18 years).

What research tells us about factors making the most difference to supporting and promoting the educational attainment of Children Looked After

Research funded by the Nuffield Foundation jointly undertaken by the University of Bristol, the Rees Centre, Department of Education, and the University of Oxford published in 2015, investigated the factors that make the most difference to the educational attainment of Children Looked After.

The initial 2015 research concentrated on the progress at secondary school (Key Stages 3-4) of children who had been in care for over a year at the end of Key Stage 4.

Detailed statistical analysis was complemented through interviews with 25 children in six local authorities and with adults significant in their educational careers, including foster carers, teachers, social workers and Virtual School Headteachers.

Key Findings

Key factors impacting educational outcomes for Children Looked After in secondary schools in England, when controlling for all factors, were found to be:

- Time in care. Children who have been in longer-term care do better than those 'in need' but not in care, and better than those who have only been in short term care – so it appears that care may protect them educationally
- Placement changes. Each additional change of care placement after age 11 is associated with one-third of a grade less at GCSE
- School changes. Children Looked After who changed school in Years 10 or 11 scored over five grades less than those who did not
- School absence. For every 5% of possible school sessions missed due to unauthorised school absences, Children Looked After scored over two grades less at GCSE
- School exclusions. For every additional day of school missed due to suspensions, Children Looked After scored one-sixth of a grade less at GCSE
- Placement type. Children living in residential or another form of care at age 16 scored over six grades less than those who were in kinship or foster care.

- School type. Children who were in special schools at age 16 scored over 14 grades lower in their GCSEs compared to those with the same characteristics who were in mainstream school. Those in pupil referral units with the same characteristics scored almost 14 grades lower.
- Educational support. Children report that teachers provide the most significant educational support for them, but teachers suggest that they need more training to do this effectively by understanding the trauma and attachment needs of the children.

Subsequent research has corroborated and extended the findings (see: www.education.ox.ac.uk) to include children in Key Stage 5.

HERTFORDSHIRE is committed to ensuring all Children Looked After achieve the best outcomes possible. We recognise that these outcomes can be enhanced by promoting their educational achievement and that foster carers play a vital role in supporting their child's education and progress.

Underpinning Legislation

The Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2021, Standard 8, is underpinned by 2 key pieces of legislation:

- Children Act 1989: Section 22(3A) – which places a statutory duty on local authority to promote educational achievement of Children Looked After
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Section 16 - Education, employment and leisure activities

Together, these laws highlight the crucial role of foster carers in actively promoting the education and achievement of their children. Children, including pre-school children and older children, need support to achieve and fulfil their educational potential and to be prepared for adulthood. Local authorities and foster carers must ensure that:

1. Children, including pre-school children and older children, have a foster home which promotes a learning environment and supports their development.

This means:

- Each child has appropriate equipment to undertake homework and study at home – a quiet place to work, a desk or table, writing equipment, access to a computer, and books.
- Commitment to and enthusiasm for education and learning is shown by foster carers and an interest is taken in the child's learning, achievement and future career potential.
- Carers take the opportunity to discuss the school day after school and note any relevant special events e.g., trips, outings etc.
- Carers support the social development of the child with friends and other pupils in their school by encouraging tea visits, attending school events (e.g. the summer fete, school plays etc.) as a family.

2. Children have access to a range of educational resources to support their learning and have opportunities beyond the school day to engage in activities which promote learning.

This means:

- It is essential that carers are good role models to children and that they are seen to enjoy reading and writing.
- Children have books to read and are living in a household that encourages reading.
- In this technological age children have reduced opportunity to write. It is important that this skill is encouraged by enabling them to write things down.
- A commitment to support learning by provision of additional learning and enrichment experiences that build on curriculum subjects, for example visits to museums, the theatre, galleries and exhibitions, learning a musical instrument, participating in a range of cultural, sport and recreational activities, in and out of school.
- Children are encouraged to attend school clubs and activities and to pursue their interests.
- Carers regularly provide activities which support literacy and numeracy for example, reading with the children, cooking and weighing ingredients.
- Carers must support homework activities and take advantage of training that will help them to do that.
- Carers must use paid allowance to support access to school trips that complement the taught curriculum.
- Carers must ensure that all children join the local library and participate in events arranged there as well as participate in learning and enrichment interventions (such as the music groups, reading project, Aim Higher residentials, tea rooms work experience project) delivered by the Virtual School.
- Carers must support high aspirations for future education and career plans, regularly exploring a wide range of possible careers with children. Activities, discussions and outings are opportunities to notice a variety of job roles and to introduce new activities and possibilities that broaden a child's horizons.

3. Children are supported to attend school, college, or alternative provision, aiming for 100% attendance and punctuality:

- Carers will aim to ensure children attend school, college or alternative provision, so that they have at least 95% attendance.
- Carers must transport or accompany statutory school-aged children to school.
- Issues over attendance or punctuality raised by the school, college or other educational setting are dealt with quickly and in co-operation with the school.
- Any absences are explained quickly and if possible, notification given prior to the event.
- Any issues of concern that may affect attendance should be raised with

the school.

- At transition times children must be accompanied to new settings and supported through change, with careful planning and preparation.
- Holidays must not be taken during school time.

Children are helped by their foster carer to achieve their educational, training and career goals and foster carers are supported to work with a child's education provider to maximise each child achievement and to minimise any underachievement. Foster carers must:

- Prepare for, attend and contribute to PEPs and any other education planning meetings.
- Fully implement any tasks or targets set out for carers in the PEP.
- Understand and discuss school reports with their child and with teachers, particularly the Designated Teacher.
- Praise, encourage and inspire children towards learning.
- Plan for significant events in the school calendar (e.g. examinations or transition) within the family to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Have up to date information on attendance, education progress and any under-achievement.
- Engage with events for parents/carers /families organised by the school, participating in school community life with their child.
- Attend regular training and information updates from the school or the Virtual School, so that they are able to understand achievement data, support their children in their learning at various ages and keep up to date with curriculum developments.
- Access the school website regularly.
- Have high expectations of their child and will raise their aspirations. Carers will help their child develop a breadth of knowledge and insight into a range of education and career pathways. Carers will encourage their child to try out new activities and to embrace opportunities to learn about different employment sectors and the world of work.

4. The fostering service has, and is fully implementing, a written education policy that promotes and values children's education and is understood by foster carers.

- The Fostering Service routinely shares Section 8 (Education) of National Minimum Standards, as summarised above, with foster carers and will review the implementation of these standards during every monthly Supervising Social Worker meetings.

5. Foster carers must maintain regular contact with each child's school, college or other education setting, attending all parents' meetings and advocating for the child where appropriate. This includes:

- Attending all relevant consultation meetings, academic review days and any special events relevant to their foster child, for example, assemblies.
- Building up a good relationship with the school so that information can be shared both ways and contact made with the school as appropriate, for example daily if attendance is an issue.
- Working with the school Designated Teacher to align planning and the

approach to learning.

- Contacting the school if there are any concerns over achievement or welfare to ensure effective interventions are in place and their child is participating fully in school, college or other educational provision.

6. Foster carers must engage and work with schools, colleges and other organisations to support children's education, including advocating to help overcome any problems the child/young person may be experiencing in their education setting. Foster carers must have up-to-date information about each child's educational progress and school attendance record.

- Foster carers are seen as an integral part of the team supporting the child and will be consulted on decisions made for children in their care.
- Foster carers must liaise with the Virtual School Education Adviser for the school to fully understand their part in the educational support plan for their child.
- Foster carers are expected to communicate regularly with the school/education setting and the Virtual School about their child so that the educational plan is tailored to their child's needs and enables the child to achieve their potential.

Marietta Harrow
Head of Achievement
Virtual School

Grete Lund
Fostering Service Manager

Sarah Baker
Head of Children Looked After
& Care Leaver Service

September 2025