

Yorke Mead Primary School
Supporting Adopted Children Policy

November 2019



Our School Vision Statement

BRINGING LEARNING to LIFE

We are a school dedicated to creating an environment where children are able to grow into happy, well-rounded individuals with a love of learning through which they can achieve to the best of their abilities.

We want our pupils to enter the wider world as

- o Happy, positive individuals*
- o Responsible citizens who make a positive contribution*
- o Confident, resilient, healthy & life-long learners.*

DARE TO...

D - Determination

A - Ambition

R - Resilience

E – Enjoyment

T - Trust

O - Openness

At Yorke Mead Primary School we understand that Adopted* and Looked After Children* have additional needs and provision should be put in place to ensure they feel safe and supported emotionally, and receive excellent educational support and provision, in order to maximize their potential.

We recognise the importance of having clear structure, policy and procedures in place to assist in welcoming Adopted children into our school.

** **Adopted children** – throughout this policy the term adopted children will be used. This term should be considered to be relevant to all adopted children, children who have been previously looked after and adopted from care and children who have been under Special Guardianship Arrangements. Children who are currently looked after by the local authority or are being looked after under Special Guardianship Arrangements have the same needs and should also be considered as part of this group.*

This policy has been developed through consultation with parents of adopted children, the Hertfordshire Adoption Support Team and adopted children at our school.

Our Aims for Adopted Children:

- For school to be a happy experience for adopted and looked after children and a place where they feel safe and supported.
- Provide a safe and secure environment, which values education, believes in the abilities and potential of all children and recognises the emotional needs that may be associated with being adopted.
- Ensure that adopted children and their families, along with the rest of the school community, are supported educationally, emotionally and socially.
- Ensure that the educational attainments of our adopted and looked after children are in line with their peers. Making sure that they have access to education appropriate to their age and ability. This includes access to a broad and balanced curriculum.
- Ensure that all staff and governors are committed to improving educational life chances for adopted children by ensuring that the relevant staff have reasonable support, access to appropriate training and understanding of the needs of adopted children.

Key People and Information Relating to Adopted Children

Designated Teacher

The Head Teacher is the designated member of staff for adopted and looked after children who will act as their advocate and co-ordinate support for them, liaising with adoptive parents and outside agencies (as appropriate) on a wide variety of educational and support issues. Attainment of Children who have been adopted or are looked after is also carefully tracked and monitored by the Inclusion Co-ordinator.

On admission, we will ensure that you and your child have the name of the Designated Teacher for adopted children and their contact details and a copy of the school's policy on supporting adopted and looked after children.

Pupil Premium Plus Grant

Each pupil who is under the care of the local authority (Looked after child) or has been adopted from care in the British system (Adopted child) is entitled to a pupil premium plus grant. This grant is £2300 for a looked after child, with the Virtual School retaining a proportion of this sum, which can be applied for as required, and is £2300 for children who have been adopted which is allocated in full to the school (£300 in Nursery) . This pupil premium is for 'helping adopted children emotionally, socially and educationally by providing specific support to raise the attainment and address their wider needs' (Department of

Education). The Head Teacher and Governors are committed to ensuring all Pupil Premium Grant funding received for the support of adopted and looked after children is appropriately spent, publically reported and the impact of the expenditure is measured. This is recorded as a separate document Pupil Premium Spending and placed in the school website.

The Impact of Life Experiences

A secure home environment, responsive carers and stable experience of school are crucial factors in children's health, and physical and emotional development. Adopted children may present particular challenges as a consequence of early trauma. This early trauma can affect their development which has an impact on their ability to learn, to form relationships, can affect their resilience, their emotions, the capability to regulate themselves, can also affect their core strength, sight and hearing and their fine motor skills and executive functioning. Many experience multiple losses, for instance, loss of their birth family, of one or many foster families, friends, and previous schools etc. At Yorke Mead we recognise that all adopted children, whether they are adopted as babies, toddlers or older, are affected in different ways by grief, loss and trauma and that adopted children often have the emotional needs of a much younger child and as such may need support to make up for what they have missed out on.

Understanding a Child's Feelings of Attachment

At time adopted children can feel anxious and can feel unsafe in a classroom. Because of this fear, their brain maybe in a state known as fight, flight or freeze which means that they are unable to access their thinking part of the brain. This makes it difficult for them to learn and to rationale their feelings. Some examples of the range of emotions they may feel within one day:

- Children who have not been in **control** of their past often seek to control their current world.
- They can feel a deep sense of **shame**, believing what happened to them was their fault; that they are bad, unloveable, unlikeable and that they will be abandoned; they become scared of further rejection and therefore try to engineer situations to achieve the rejection they fear as a form of trying to protect themselves.
- Some work hard to be compliant and helpful but beneath their attempt to be good, there may be a traumatised child struggling continuously to 'fit in' to avoid further **hurt**.
- Many have been let down by adults in their life; they find it extremely difficult to **trust** others and then struggle to form friendships and attachments with those who try to care for them.
- Children finding it difficult to manage and make sense of their emotions and to regulate themselves signal that they need help via challenging behaviours which may be seen superficially as expressions of **anger** or rage.
- Children feeling **anxious** can struggle with listening as their mind is in a muddle so not open to new stimuli.
- Children may refuse to do work as they are **afraid** to fail or may struggle with it and then feel helpless and hopeless and these are feelings they are trying to avoid.
- Children may **panic** and constantly need reassurance and ask lots of questions, sometimes repetitively, as they are desperate to get it right; it is too 'dangerous' to get it wrong.
- Children may call out or require constant attention, they may feel the need to be first for examples in a line or the front of a queue as they are so worried that they are going to be forgotten about.

Support for Adopted Children at Yorke Mead

At Yorke Mead our whole school ethos is to be inclusive of all our children. We have an experienced pastoral team who are highly qualified and experienced to look after all our children. We have many interventions to help with social skills, protective behaviours, nurture groups, identity work, help with self-esteem and our weekly timetable includes mindfulness sessions. All children in Yorke Mead complete a helpful hand where they name five people who they can go to if they need help.

At Yorke Mead we understand that adopted children have greater needs to feel emotionally secure, and their educational achievement needs additional support and careful tracking. The whole school including office staff, lunchtime supervisor, IT staff, the caretaker and even some governors have all received training in relation to attachment and trauma.

Key Worker or Key Adult

Relationships are absolutely key to successful experiences for all children, but especially adopted children. Our approach and policies are built on helping children develop safe and secure relationships with all adults in school but with recognition that there will be key people whom children will feel more safe and secure with.

We recognise the importance of children who have attachment difficulties that they have a key adult to support them to develop relative dependency. The aim of this is to give the child a key person who he/she feels comfortable and safe with for the times when the child needs reassurance. If they find it difficult to ask for help a key ring or suitable object is given to them so that they can show it when they need help

The 'key adult' will not spend all of their time with the child. The time spent will depend upon the level of need. This could range from a 20min check-in on a weekly basis to full one-to-one support.

There will be key times for the key adult to have involvement with the child. These include times when there may be contact with the birth family, changes of teacher, start of a new year, times when there are sensitive issues in the curriculum e.g. baby & toddler week, anything involving family trees, drug education etc. Any transition time or even having to end something can cause some children difficulties and the key adult can help support them through these transitions.

Training to Support Emotional Needs

All staff at Yorke Mead are trained in **Emotion Coaching**. This approach to talking to children at difficult points in their day allows the children to begin to recognise and understand their emotions, and that these emotions are natural, before trying to consider the behaviour and adapt the behaviour that can stem from these emotions. There are 3 key steps in emotion coaching:

Step 1 *Empathise, validate and label* E.g. *I can see you are feeling angry xxx. You became angry when xxx took the ball from you. It is okay to feel angry if someone takes something from you. I would be angry if someone took a ball from me in that way.*

Step 2 *Set Limits* E.g. *It is okay to be angry with xxx but it is not okay for you to kick xxx because you are angry.*

Step 3 *Problem solve with the child* E.g. *Next time anyone takes the ball off you what might you do to differently to solve the problem? (Discuss options with the child)*

Staff have all also completed the **Kate Cairns Attachment Training** as part of the Hertfordshire Attachment aware Schools Project and understand the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) on children's development.

Yorke Mead is a **Hertfordshire STEPS** school which is a therapeutic based approach to supporting children's emotional and behavioural needs. All of these approaches focus on understanding that behaviour is a form of communication and support children to learn to manage their feelings successfully. The school is highly reflective and is always considering which approach would best support which individual child or group of children. As such we will endeavour to use the best strategy available to us (see Emotional Support Interventions further down).

Success Plans

To achieve educational success for children it is essential they feel part of the process so that any intervention to support their education happens with them, not to them. We have introduced Success Plans as a way of setting pupils targets and monitoring their progress against these targets. The Success Plans belong to the children and are kept in their classrooms. Termly success planning meetings with the children and their parents are held in order to maintain strong home, school, child links.

Home School Link Book

Adopted or looked after children will be given a home school link book. Parents of adopted children have told us the importance of being able to communicate quickly and easily with school when the day starts in a tricky way. The book will be signed each day by the parents and an adult in school as a way of knowing it has been read. Notes of key things in the school day or at home can be recorded as required.

Protective Behaviours Support

Protective Behaviours is a safety awareness and resilience building programme that helps children recognise any situation when they feel worried or unsafe, such as feeling stressed or threatened, and explores with them practical ways to help them feel safe. Protective Behaviours teaches children that there is someone to listen and help. It is based upon two key messages:

- *We all have the right to feel safe all of the time.*
- *We can talk with someone about anything, even if it feels awful or small.*

Every adopted or looked after child will have the opportunity to access protective behaviour training at Yorke Mead during each key stage.

Emotional Support Interventions

Children who are not emotionally regulated and feeling secure do not learn effectively. At Yorke Mead we recognise the importance of feeling safe and secure. There are a number of ways we can support children emotionally

- **Adopted Children Support Group** – talking to parents of adopted children they felt there was benefit of bringing adopted children together. The aim is that they understand that there are other children who have experiences similar to theirs and that they are not 'different' or 'alone' in this.
- **Secure Base Work** – we have two staff members trained to offer secure base work to children. Secure base work allows time to play in a safe environment, establish a relationship with a key adult in school and to explore emotions and feelings in a safe, secure way.
- **Therapy and Therapeutic Support** – our pastoral team have been trained to provide Theraplay, Lego therapy, Drawing and Talking. We also buy in other play therapists and art therapists when needed. The pastoral team also organise various nurture groups to help with self-esteem, friendships and other social interactions which our children struggle with
- **Emotional Check-ins** – children may have their emotional development regulated or maintained through regular 'check-in', which is a chance to talk 1:1 with their secure base worker.

- **Emotion Scales** – Adopted or looked after children may benefit from the use of emotion scales so it is easy for them to identify times when they are feeling anxious or worried about things.
- Some adopted children have difficulties with **sensory processing and auditory processing**, so sensory breaks, muscle breaks can be implemented. All classrooms have a quiet table and we are aware of the importance of where some children have to sit in the classroom and where they should be placed in a queue or line up. We recognise that playtime is often a difficult time for adopted children and looked after children so we have strategies to help at these times.
- **Core Strength Building and Hypermobility** - Many adopted children who have been severely neglected in the past may have weak core strength. We utilise our sports coaches to work 1:1 or in very small groups to help develop core strength and co-ordination skills.

Other Agencies - we often liaise with other agencies and experts, including Hertfordshire Adoption Support and the Virtual School to obtain advice and strategies to help our adopted children.

Transitions

Any change can create huge anxiety for a child who has experienced trauma of loss in their lives so we are keenly aware of transitions and how these may impact on our adopted and looked after children. These transitions may be daily (between parent and teacher) or more significant transitions, such as returning from a school holiday or transferring to a new class or year group.

Day to day transitions

To support day-to-day transitions between home and school we suggest parents have a small box containing something simple, and not valuable, of their own that they give to their child to look after in school. On entering the class the child simply gives the box to the teacher enabling a connection to be made at the start of the day, and at the end of the day the teacher gives the box back to the child to return to you. We recognise that adopted children like routine and can find surprises difficult and so each classroom has a visual timetable for children to follow. In some circumstances parents are given weekly timetables to take home so they can go through the timetable with their child before the start of the day. We also recognise the importance of social stories for day trips or residential trips.

Holiday transitions

To help the child know they are 'kept in mind' and to maintain the link between home and school at holiday times the teachers will give your child a postcard to look after that is a photograph of some part of the school. This helps your child to keep a connection with school in the holiday. The postcard can be returned to school after the holiday if this helps. On return after a holiday our pastoral team will ensure they check in with your child a little more regularly to help them settle back into school.

Transitions to a new class

This is by far the biggest transition for adopted and looked after children as so often it involves a new environment, new teachers and new approaches. There can also be a feeling of another loss of their 'old teacher' or familiar adults. Handling this transition sensitively is very important. To support this we ensure that:

- Adopted or looked after children have more frequent visits to their new classroom prior to the holidays.
- The new teacher will work with the class before the school summer holidays both in the children's familiar classroom and in the new classrooms.
- A special transition book is made to support the transition over the 6 week holiday. This book goes home with the child for parents to read with their child.
- Before the end of the summer term parents of adopted children will have the chance to meet with the new teacher to discuss their child.

Establishing a Strong Partnership between Home and School

By far the most important thing is good communication between home and school. We aim to achieve this through:

- **Regular success plan** meetings where targets are set for the child. These targets are achievable, measurable and manageable to suit the child's levels/needs. These meetings are ideal for gathering the views of the child, teachers and parents which makes it possible to identify the intervention needed to support the child's needs, which then informs Pupil Premium Plus spending.
- The **home school link book** - it is helpful if the school is aware of when birth family contact and any 'tough' anniversaries are due, as these may affect the child's emotional state and behaviour in school. The link book can be used to communicate to school about this and any other difficulties as they arise on the day. Likewise communication from school can be more regular and timely.
- **Communicating and sharing** the personal achievements with one another even if they are small - don't just focus on any negative incidents.
- Ensuring the message is the same from school and home. We should aim to not battle against one another as children will pick up on this and could be confused or play one against the other.
- Supporting parents to have a clear understanding of the school policies and discipline procedures, so both parents and school explain these to their child on their level. It is also useful for parents and teachers to discuss the impact of school policies on the child and agree how to work with these in order to bring in any minor adjustments required to effectively support the adopted child.
- Sharing any triggers or emotional outburst between one another, including exploring how it was dealt with to find what does and doesn't work for the child.
- Parents know their own children! We understand that listening and accepting parents' concerns are important to developing a strong partnership. We are well aware that some children 'hold it in' at school so it is important to tell us of any difficulties so that we can help.

Being Aware of the Potential Triggers of Curriculum Topics

At Yorke Mead we recognize that parts of the curriculum have the potential to trigger difficult emotions and memories of distress for an adopted child. In order to help them prepare for and manage these emotions, we encourage parents and teachers get together to discuss a child's needs and how their respective styles can complement one another to help build children's confidence in their skills. It is essential that our adopted and looked after children have support when they find participation difficult and feel valued and included at all times.

Rehearsal and role play of possible situations may help the child make the right choices when they are presented with challenging areas such as:

- family trees or family history
- child's personal/first memories and timelines
- sex and relationship education
- growth and development
- photographs or baby/early years topics
- changing in front of others for PE may be challenging
- themes which include loss, failure or loneliness
- PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education)
- guest speakers who discuss topics such as drugs, alcohol, personal safety and the law
- uniforms, such as police uniforms could be a trigger
- food can sometimes be a trigger
- memories and emotions

- celebration dates, religious beliefs and anniversary such as father's and mother's day, Christmas and Easter celebrations

The important thing to remember is that ANYTHING could be a trigger to a memory and at that time the child may not even realise what the trigger is but feeling returns.

Not only are we sensitive to these triggers we also do our best to include all children in these activities so adapt our teaching accordingly.

Physical Assistance

We recognise that some adopted children may have some physical difficulties as a result of their early trauma or past experiences, for example, weak core strength, hyper mobility, difficulties with their fine motor skills, their eye tracking and stamina. Yorke Mead where necessary have provide interventions to help with core strength exercises, exercises to help with fine motor skills, provision of classroom aids such as coloured sheets over writing, raised writing desks, spell checkers, laptops etc.

Every Child an Individual

This policy highlights the ways in which Yorke Mead School supports children who have been adopted or are in the care of the local authority. However, it is essential to remember that every child is an individual. One cap will not fit all – and this is very true of all children, including adopted children too. Working together with parents is key to this, and we recognise that aspects of our policy may need to be adapted according to individual circumstances.