

### **Educational considerations when a child is moving to a pre-adoptive family.**

When a child moves to a pre-adoptive family, it often requires a school move, as well as a house move. The primary concern is for the child to develop relationships with the new family. The child needs to feel safe and secure. It is likely to result in a short period when the child is not in education. The aim of this document is to minimise the impact that this may have on the child's progress and attainment, as well as to ensure a smooth transition into the new school.

The appropriateness of the strategies below should be considered in light of each child, family and school's unique situation.

#### **Prior to the child moving in with the pre-adoptive family**

- The choice of destination school should be discussed with the Virtual School. The statutory guidance advises that children in care should attend schools which are rated as good or outstanding by OFSTED.
- The prospective adopters should organise to visit the possible schools to look around. The schools should provide the prospective adopters with a prospectus and any other relevant documentation. This is an opportunity to find out about the school's experience of supporting children who have experienced early trauma, or have attachment needs. PAC-UK provide some useful questions to ask:  
<https://www.pac-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Key-Questions-for-Primary-Schools-V1.2-1.pdf>  
<https://www.pac-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Key-Questions-for-Secondary-Schools-V1.2-1.pdf>
- Once a collective decision has been made about the most appropriate school, the child's social worker is responsible for completing and submitting the admission form.
- It may be appropriate for the family to visit the existing school to meet with the teacher, or DT to get a flavour of the child's learning profile. This would be in addition to the school being invited to attend the child appreciation event. However, it is likely that the child will be unaware of the match at this point. Therefore this may need to be after school hours, or alternatively if there is a time during the day when the child is not on the school site, so that the child does not inadvertently come into contact with the prospective adopters. If distance does not enable to face to face visit, schools should be able to facilitate a virtual visit.
- A transition meeting (this might be the PEP meeting) should be held which includes the current school and new school, current carers, prospective adopters and social workers. This should focus on the current school and carers experience of 'what works well' both in terms of supporting the child's emotional needs as well as educational progress. It should detail transition arrangements with rough timescales for visits and starting school. It will be possible to alter these at any stage, but having them in place early can minimise drift.
- It is important that everyone has a common understanding of names used by the child, when talking to and about their adoptive and birth families. Consideration should be given to the surname by which the child will be known (this could be either the birth or adoptive family name).
- The current school should consider appropriate leaving arrangements e.g. peers to make cards, possibly purchasing a book that the class have focused on as a gift, leavers' assembly. The child's 'key adult' will be especially important, leading up to the change of placement and school. The school need to be receptive to the fact that the child may need additional reassurance and 'nurture time' whilst also recognising the need for consistency and routine. It may be appropriate to have age appropriate, direct conversation with the child, "you may have a wobble, this will be hard but everyone is going to help you settle and do your best".
- The current school should ensure that they collect photos, work, videos etc. of the child's time at school, which can form part of the child's life story work.

### **Once the child has moved in with the pre-adoptive family but prior to starting at the new school**

- The pre-adoptive family should look at the new school website with the child and consider any questions that the child may have about the school.
- Organise a visit with the child to look round the school and ask any questions that they may have. The transition meeting should have given the new school an opportunity to find out about the child's interests e.g. if the child is keen on sport, the tour of the school could incorporate a focus on the sporting resources and provision on offer within the school.
- It may be appropriate for the school to prepare a book for the child, with photos of key adults and areas of the school, to share at home. It may be possible to organise for the child to take home a class teddy, which they could bring back to school when they start. For an older child it may be helpful for the class teacher and key adults to create an 'all about me' sheet for the child to have. This can help the child to quickly feel more comfortable with the key adults.
- Provide the family with information on the themes / topics that are being covered and ideas of how the family could support pre-learning, ready for when the child starts school. This may include experiences and active learning e.g. if the theme is autumn:
  - go to the local park
  - play in the leaves
  - collect leaves for a collage
  - take photos of autumnal things e.g. conkers, bare trees etc.
  - create prints or leaf rubbings
  - sort leaves by colour, size, shape
  - visit the library and get non-fiction books on autumn and related story books to share at home

The purpose of immersing the child in these sorts of activities is to enable connection with the family, familiarity with the local environment, as well as exposure to vocabulary and experiences which should help the child feel that they have valuable contributions to make when they start school. It may be appropriate for the child to bring some of the things in that they have completed at home to share with their teacher / key person when they start school. It is important that there is no stress or pressure associated with the activities, families will need to judge how much and which activities are most appropriate to the child and family.

### **To be in place for when the child starts the new school**

- Actions discussed at the transition meeting should be in place.
- The new school should consider organising a 'buddy' to be with the child in the first few days.
- The child should have a 'key adult/s' that will 'touch base' with them regularly.
- Schools should bear in mind that 'suddenly becoming parents' could mean that parents may have missed out on the events and experiences that many birth parents will have had e.g. developing friendships with other parents in the community through antenatal classes, attending play groups, or new parents meetings at school, where they have been exposed to approaches to early learning. It may be appropriate for the class teacher or relevant member of staff to meet with the parents to explain how the school approaches reading, phonics, writing, maths etc. and how the parents can best support learning at home. Parents will also need information on general school rules and routines. Parents may welcome school support in meeting other parents and becoming part of the community.
- Schools should consider how best to develop home / school communication, parents may have lots of questions to begin with and will also need effective communication, as to how their child is settling.
- There is a statutory requirement that a Personal Education Plan (PEP) is completed each school term until the adoption is finalised. Cambridgeshire Virtual School has created an Education Support Plan (ESP) which schools and families may want to use once the adoption is finalised. This enables a regular review of progress, planning for next steps and consideration of the use of pupil premium plus. A template is available on the Virtual School website [Cambridgeshire Virtual School - Learn Together \(cambslearntogether.co.uk\)](https://www.cambslearntogether.co.uk)