

Permanently Placed Children: Key Questions for Primary Schools

Parents often tell us that they don't know what to look for when choosing a school. In consultations with experienced adoptive parents, we've identified some key questions for parents and schools to consider. Not all will be relevant for every child. It's unlikely that any school will be doing all of these; look for flexible schools who are willing to listen and learn and are proactive about developing support to meet each child's needs.

Have staff received training on attachment and the impact of early trauma and loss?

Who was involved in the training? E.g. Did senior leadership attend? Were Teaching Assistants included? Was it cascaded to playground supervisors? What has been the impact throughout the school?

How does the school provide consistent key relationships for children with attachment needs?

E.g. named members of staff as key workers for children, with quality 1:1 time scheduled into the child's day or week, with particular attention to the times when the child is most vulnerable? Staff who are aware of how to let the child know that they are held in mind? Ways to help children stay connected e.g. a postcard in the holidays?

Where is the safe base for children when they need to calm down or regulate?

Is there a nurture group, and how do they prioritise children to be part of this? Is it used as a planned daily intervention? Is there a nurture space or calming zone which children can access as and when needed with a key member of staff?

What is the behaviour management policy?

Does the school apply the policy flexibly to best meet the needs of each child e.g. if they use a yellow/red card system or a sunshine - storm clouds system for moving children 'up' and 'down' based on their behaviour, will they use a different non-shaming strategy for your child? Does the school see behaviour as communication and focus on meeting those needs? What is the school's approach to exclusion?

What support is in place for children who find unstructured times difficult?

E.g. Is there an indoor lunch club for more vulnerable children, where they can develop their social skills, or calm down and relax? Do the midday supervisors organise structured games on the playground? Are there systems for children who want to play with friends e.g. a buddy system or a friendship bench?

How does the school provide structure and consistency?

E.g. sticking to timetable at Christmas and ends of terms; letting parents and children know as soon as possible about staff changes and supply teachers; providing a timetable for parents to prepare the child at home; using visual timetables to let children know about upcoming change.

How does the school share the information you give them about your child's background and needs?

E.g. systems; meetings; policies... If 'need to know' basis, how is this decided and clarified with everyone including parents?

How does the school share information with parents?

E.g. does the class teacher speak to parents at the end of the day, or call home? Are staff able to email parents if needed? Is there a text message system e.g. to notify parents about snow days?

How does the school connect adoptive parents and special guardians together?

Do they provide a coffee morning? Are they willing to have a standing item in their newsletter letting everyone know about any meetings convened by parents themselves?

How has the school used its Pupil Premium Plus for adopted and special guardianship pupils?

Social and emotional interventions or only learning? Is the PP+ clearly differentiated from the overall pupil premium pot for children entitled to free school meals? Does the school meet with parents to identify children's needs (e.g. personal education plan meetings), or consult adoptive parents as a group about use of the grant?

How does the school support children who find it difficult to manage their feelings?

E.g. nurture group; calm boxes; a calming zone within the school; emotion regulation skills teaching and coaching; anger management training; empathy from all staff; social skills groups.

How does the school manage curriculum hotspots i.e. issues which might trigger your child

E.g. liaise with parents about baby photos and family trees; cards for mothers' and fathers' day; subjects such as evacuees in WW2 in English and History; NSPCC and Children in Needs assemblies...