Education reform is our national mission. Only by everyone working together will we ensure that our young people have an equal opportunity to reach the highest standards. For some there will be additional challenges that require careful, but robust, support and intervention. This is especially true of those children who are looked after, each and every one of whom will have encountered challenging life experiences we would never wish for our own children. Your role as a foster carer is absolutely crucial to support the children in your care through their very important journey in education.

What has become clear is that despite the barriers, the ambitions of looked after children, their aspirations and their plans for the future remain high. We know that significant adults who play a part in the life of a looked after child have an extremely important role in helping to deliver the realisation of these aspirations.

It is critical that the aspirations and ambitions of significant adults at the very least mirror those of the looked after child. Strong and appropriate support – aligned with an unswerving sense of belief - is essential. The support and encouragement you provide as foster carers will be crucial in achieving that.

There is a significant role for the local authority as the corporate parent, education services and schools, but the work undertaken in developing the Welsh Government’s education strategy – Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales – also highlighted the key role of foster carers.

This guide is designed to help support you as an integral part of the team around the child and to equip you with the skills and knowledge to do so. You can help identify the learning and emotional needs of the children they care for, and can support them to achieve improved outcomes.

I want you to gain confidence to work on an equal footing with your partners in education and to feel empowered to challenge schools when things are not going as you think they should.

This guide is an important first step towards equipping you with a common language and the confidence to do exactly that to ensure children in your care are able to access the right support in school and achieve their potential.

I am grateful to The Fostering Network for its continuing commitment in support of foster carers in Wales to help deliver better outcomes for children who enter the care system, and for its work with foster carers to produce this very important education guide. I commend it to foster carers in particular, but also to schools and education services which need to work together with you to ensure the very best educational outcomes for looked after children.
There is no doubting the importance of education in every child’s life. This is as true for those in care as it is for every child and yet we know that those who grow up in care can often leave school with fewer qualifications than their peers.

This is something that has to be put right, which is why I’m very pleased that The Fostering Network, supported by the Welsh Government, has produced this helpful guide for foster carers.

I know from my work as the Children’s Commissioner for Wales (2008-15) that children and young people in care value trusted relationships with adults very highly and look to their foster carers to provide advice and support, to be that trusted adult in their lives.

Education can change children and young people’s lives for the better. It can inspire, inform and provide opportunity. Together with good quality foster care, education can help every child and young person to achieve their full potential.

One day, we will look back to a time when children in care did not do well in education and see what progress has been made. That vision will only come to pass if we all play our part. The importance of foster carers supporting children and young people’s education is key to that success.

Keith Towler
Associate of The Fostering Network and
Children’s Commissioner Wales (2008-15)
Acknowledgements

The production of *A foster carer’s guide to education in Wales* has involved many people who have been generous in both their time and expertise. I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to them.

Special thanks to the following individuals who contributed text for this guide:

- Joanna Adande, practice support consultant, The Fostering Network.
- Jenny Ford, former deputy headteacher at Whitchurch High School, Cardiff.
- Shaun O’Connell, former headteacher at Coryton Primary School, Cardiff.
- Alun Richards, co-ordinator, Fosterline Wales.

Particular thanks to John Galloway for his text contributions and his help in editing this guide.

**Maria Boffey**
Business Development and Programmes Manager
The Fostering Network Wales
International research shows that children and young people in care have poorer educational outcomes than their peers.

In January 2016, the Welsh Government published its strategy *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales*. It focuses on working with foster carers to improve educational outcomes for looked after children. We are grateful to the Welsh Government for encouraging and working with us in the production of this guide.

Work commissioned, from The Fostering Network by the Welsh Government in 2015, found that foster carers believed they lacked knowledge about the school system and how best to work with school staff. This guide recognises your role as an integral part of the team around the child, working to support the ambitions and aspirations of the children in your care.

Foster carers can and do make a huge difference. This guide will help you understand better how the education system works in Wales, so you are better equipped to support the children and young people in your care. It will also help you to engage in meaningful discussions with other practitioners, when necessary, to ensure that looked after children and young people get the greatest benefit from their time in school, and in the education and employment opportunities that will subsequently present themselves.

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Introduction

Our school days have a huge impact on the rest of our lives. For fostered children and young people, experiences at school are likely to have an even greater impact on their sense of identity and self-esteem. For some, school may provide a level of stability that is missing from every other aspect of their lives. In the midst of insecurities and uncertainties about where they will live, where they belong, who they can trust and what the future holds, school can provide familiar faces, familiar routines and welcome predictability.

We know that doing well at school can lead to improved confidence and self-esteem, lower levels of stress, greater resilience, less risk-taking behaviour, more engagement in society, and more chances to develop positive, supportive relationships.

If our school lives are progressing well, the rest of our life experiences improve, contributing to a more positive cycle of behaviour which will impact positively on our experiences of school. And if school experiences are positive, educational achievements and attainment are likely to be higher. A combination of positive experiences and educational achievements build resilience to cope with other parts of life.

Parents and foster carers are fundamental to a child’s progress in school. Whilst the local authority is the corporate parent, you as foster carers have day-to-day responsibility and many tasks will fall to you under delegated authority – the mechanism that enables you to attend parents’ evenings, sign for school trips and organise sleep-overs.

“

My foster carers had a massive impact on my education. When I first moved in with them I was attending a very disruptive school in special measures and looking at U’s for my GCSE’s. They moved house for me to go to a better school and supported, and believed in me when nobody else did. They encouraged me to believe in myself and through their help and my determination I left school with 14 A*-C Grades.”
The Fostering Network has published a handbook which contains a lot of useful guidance on delegated authority.

Social workers are responsible for creating the Care and Support Plan, and bring together a range of practitioners (including foster carers) to create the Personal Education Plan (PEP) – as an integral part of the Care and Support Plan. However, you will be responsible for ensuring the welfare, nurturing and development of the child or young person on a daily basis. By instilling positive attitudes to education, nourishing aspirations and maintaining high expectations you can help lay the foundations for success in later life.

The Welsh Government, through its strategy *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales*⁴, has set out the national strategic approach to strengthening partnership and collaboration between all of the key people involved in the life of a looked after child. The important and significant roles of foster carers, residential child care workers, kinship carers and parents are recognised fully in supporting and motivating children to value, access and attend school or educational and training placements.

A key commitment in the strategy is to provide further support for foster carers, so that the promotion of education is paramount and under-performance is not accepted. This guide has been produced to help foster carers work with key partners in the education system to ensure that decisions impact positively on children and young people. It complements the Welsh Government’s updated parents and carers guides.⁵

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Welsh schools are organised in four Key Stages, covering compulsory education starting at five years old – or even earlier at a nursery school - up to 16-years old. After that, children and young people might stay on in a sixth form, or transition to another establishment in further education or employment.

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At the end of Foundation Phase, Key Stages 2 and 3, teachers determine how well all children are progressing against standard levels of the national curriculum. At the end of Key Stage 4, young people will take GCSEs, or similar qualifications, as they get ready to move on to the next stage of their lives, whether that is continuing to learn, getting a job, or a combination of both.

At each Key Stage, the national curriculum provides a framework for what they will be taught.
The Foundation Phase

There are different points at which children might start school.

- At the beginning of the term following their third birthday, they can start part-time in a nursery.
- At the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday, they can attend full-time in Reception.
- However, some schools allow them to start full-time in the September following their fourth birthday.

In the Foundation Phase (from Nursery to Year 2) children will follow a developmental curriculum, not a subject based one. There will be lots of practical activities, problem-solving and creative and imaginative sessions, both indoors and outdoors. Learning is organised into seven areas:

1. **Personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity**
   Children will learn about themselves and their relationships with others to develop confidence and sound moral values. Welsh culture and the wider world are also included.

2. **Language, literacy and communication (this will be in English or Welsh, depending on the language policy of the school)**
   Speaking, listening and communicating are covered, along with developing the skills of reading and writing through enjoying stories, songs and rhymes.

3. **Mathematical development**
   Children will get a grounding in numeracy skills, including number, money, time and shape. They will play with numbers, count, sing songs and rhymes, solve problems, learn about shapes, and make patterns.
4. Welsh language development (English medium schools only)

Welsh is introduced to children in nursery and is used to communicate throughout the school. Every day they sing songs, play games and enjoy activities.

5. Knowledge and understanding of the world

Children learn about the world around through questioning, expressing ideas and opinions, and having experiences that help them to increase their curiosity about the world around them, and help them begin to understand past events, people and places, living things and the work that people do.

6. Physical development

Along with regular exercise children will learn about health, hygiene and diet.

7. Creative development

The Foundation Phase encourages children to take part in imaginative activities through art, design, music, dance and movement, which develops their creative ideas, communication skills, and reflect on their work.

Young children develop through secure and nurturing relationships. However, many looked after children have missed out on such relationships. Foster carers and teachers can, through the way they interact with others, show looked after children what positive relationships look like. It is important to note that relationships need to be modelled to them by their foster carers and teachers. Helping children with attachment will help them develop in other areas, such as increased resilience, social competence, the ability to play and empathise with others and problem-solving as well as communication and language.
**Key Stage 2**

There are several compulsory subjects at this Key Stage, divided between the national curriculum and basic curriculum. The national curriculum has ‘core subjects’ - English, Welsh, mathematics and science, and ‘non-core’ - design and technology, information communication technology (ICT), history, geography, art, music, drama and physical education (PE). Each of these subjects has a programme of study, specifying the skills and content that schools are expected to deliver to children and young people. The ‘basic curriculum’, which covers religious education (RE) and personal and social education (PSE), is compulsory for delivery by schools. However, unlike the national curriculum, there are no statutory programmes of study.

Schools have the flexibility to tailor these subjects to the needs of their children and young people, with non statutory frameworks being available to support them in delivering a broad and balanced range of skills and topics. Also, at Key Stage 2, schools are able to deliver a wider, age appropriate, sex and relationship education (SRE) programme, beyond any content specified in the programmes of study for the national curriculum subjects. The decision whether to provide a wider SRE programme is at the discretion of individual schools.

**Key Stage 3**

Key Stage 3 is the first three years at secondary school (Years 7, 8, and 9) when children are aged between 11 and 14. The basic curriculum subjects (RE and PSE) remain compulsory, with SRE becoming compulsory for delivery. The national curriculum still applies again, with core subjects of English, Welsh, mathematics and science, and non-core ones of Welsh second language, modern foreign languages, design and technology, ICT, history, geography, art, music, drama and PE.

**Key Stage 4**

This is the time when students in mainstream schools follow the options they chose at Key Stage 3. However, seven subjects remain compulsory:

- English
- Welsh (or Welsh second language)
- Mathematics
- Science
- Religious Education (RE)
- Personal and Social Education (PSE)
- Physical Education (PE)

Most students will follow GCSE courses, whilst there is also the Welsh Baccalaureate available. Schools must also provide work-related education and careers guidance.

Some students may not be working at a high enough level to follow a full timetable of GCSE courses. They might have a reduced timetable to give more space to study core subjects, or be following other courses, such as Pre-Entry or ASDAN (a pioneering curriculum development organisation), both of which are designed to recognise the skills of lower attaining children and young people.
Assessment and reporting

Throughout their time in school, children and young people should be assessed regularly and the outcomes reported to you at least annually. There should also be regular parents’ evenings to discuss your child’s progress, talk about how you can help, and raise any concerns. These take on greater significance when it comes to times such as choosing exam courses or changing schools.

All maintained schools are required by law to have a designated lead member of staff for looked after children (referred to hereafter in the guide as the ‘designated teacher’ for ease of reference). This should be a senior member of staff who has a lead role in promoting the educational experience of looked after children. They should make themselves known to the child as someone they can confide in, who will take their issues seriously and will help manage them. This person should be your first point of contact if you have any general concerns about your child’s education or well-being in school, and you should make enquiries of the school to identify the designated teacher at the earliest opportunity.

Dylan, the child I care for, was struggling in school and some of the teachers didn’t seem to understand his needs. I decided to speak to the school’s designated member of staff to get more help for him. Establishing a good relationship with her was the best thing I could have done. I shared my concerns with her and we then discussed how best to tackle them. She was then better able to help other teachers to better understand Dylan’s needs, and perhaps helped relieve some of my worries.

Children and young people are assessed to establish a starting point as they enter compulsory education in Reception. From Year 2 to Year 8, they are tested annually in reading and numeracy. You will receive a report at the end of every year to tell you of their progress. This should include information about how well all the children in their year are doing, and all children across Wales.

Annual reports will continue in secondary school. At the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9) teacher assessments are undertaken in all subjects. In Key Stage 4, young people will be taking GCSEs, or other appropriate courses. They will get the results of these in the August after they have completed compulsory education.
Successful Futures: Independent Review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales

Successful Futures: Independent Review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales 6, led by Professor Graham Donaldson, was published in February 2015. In October 2015, A curriculum for Wales: a curriculum for life 7, was published, outlining the plan for achieving all of the recommendations within Successful Futures.

The intention is that the new curriculum will be made available from September 2018 and used to support teaching and learning in schools and settings from September 2021.

Post-16

Most young people continue with some form of education or training after the compulsory school years are ended. This could be in full-time education or part-time as part of an apprenticeship or training scheme. For more details see the section later on in this guide.

Pupil Referral Units (PRU)

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) cater for children who are out of school, often, but not always, because they have been excluded, or are at risk of being so. Not all learners in PRUs have a statement. Depending on the age of the young person, attendance at a PRU should ideally only be short term, before the child returns to the mainstream school.

Whether a statement is issued or not, the school or PRU should be making sure that they are meeting the child or young person’s learning needs. This may be with additional support, specialist lessons, using ICT, working in small groups, or providing additional services, such as counselling, speech therapy or music therapy.

7 dera.ioe.ac.uk/24680/1/151021-a-curriculum-for-wales-a-curriculum-for-life-en_Redacted.pdf
How children learn

We all learn in our own unique way. Each of us has a preferred way of working, often known as a learning style. This does not mean that we only like information presented to us in a very specific way, but simply that we find some approaches more useful than others. We can help children to learn more effectively by helping them recognise this and by tailoring what we do, say and show them, to reflect it.

Theories about learning styles can be dressed up differently, but generally we learn through our senses in three ways:

**Visual** – children remember best what they see. For instance, when learning a foreign language they may need to see a new word written down as well as hearing it. Or they might like to organise mind-maps of facts and information and draw links between them.

**Auditory** – children like to learn through hearing. They respond to spoken instructions, and enjoy talks and discussions. When working out a maths problem they might talk it through to themselves, speaking out loud, or they may want to describe a piece of artwork before they paint it. Perhaps they can record themselves and listen back.

**Kinaesthetic or tactile** – means that children learn by doing and touching. They enjoy practical activities, whether that is role play or building models. In maths they may like to use equipment such as wooden blocks and strips to do calculations, or building a model of a volcano in plasticine to understand how one works.

None of this means we only learn in one way, and most things are learnt through all these learning styles. Learning to play a guitar, for instance, requires us to finger strings, listen to the noise made and read notation. The more ways we can offer children to learn, the more chances are that they will better understand.
Learning at home

Time at school is not the only time that children and young people learn. A lot happens at home too.

Primary schools will usually have a scheme for children starting to read to take books home. It is important to read regularly, even if it is only for a relatively short time each day. Literacy is fundamental to education and learning, and increasing the time increases the opportunity for children and young people to succeed in education.

Work to make reading enjoyable - have fun! Talk about books, read to your child, ask them what they like, discuss the illustrations; ask how the story might progress, or what might happen next. Remain positive and encouraging even if the progress shown by the individual child might appear to not be as great as you might like.

Some children may find homework daunting. Whilst the aim should be completion, check with the teachers how long it is expected to take and work to this with your child, otherwise tasks can seem endless and will squeeze out time for other pursuits and relaxation.

Informal learning

There are many opportunities outside school to help children learn. You probably already use many of them.

- Sing songs and nursery rhymes, such as counting, times tables and the alphabet. Point out the rhymes in the song.
- Go to the library together, or browse bookshops.
- Play word games, such as I Spy, Hangman or Scrabble.
- Point out words and numbers around you, in the street, in shops, on a menu or billboard.
- Play alongside them on educational apps or games.
- Research their interests with them on the internet, perhaps watching ‘how to’ videos on YouTube.
- Make things together, such as models, cakes or greetings cards.
- Talk to them and ask them questions. Introduce new words to develop their vocabulary.
- When travelling, work out how far to go, how long you have been on the road or what your average speed is. Look for sequences of numbers or letters on number plates.
- Read bus timetables or TV guides together. Work out how long you have to wait.
- Count out money and calculate change.
- Practise timetables together.
- Stick words on flashcards around your house for them to read.
- Cook together, buy the ingredients looking for value for money, then weigh them out, re-calculating for different portions.
- Encourage them to highlight or underline key facts in books.

If children are sitting exams, help them work out a timetable for revision. Put up post-it notes of key facts around the house, or create sets of flashcards, then test their knowledge. It will help to work through sections of past papers – many of them are easy to find on the internet. The night before the exam encourage them to relax before bed and to get plenty of sleep, then make sure they eat well before they set off for school.

Give all children plenty of praise, but focus on what they have done and do well, rather than what they are. That means saying: ‘Well done, you have worked hard,’ rather than: ‘Well done, you are a clever girl.’

You can also help children learn to be organised and establish good routines, such as packing their bag the night before and making sure they have the right equipment, like the correct type of calculator for the level of maths or science they are studying.
Helping with homework

All schools should have a homework policy. This is usually posted on their website, laying out what children and young people can expect to receive, including how much time it should take, and often what subjects will be set on which days. Some schools also record specific pieces of homework online, perhaps in a class diary or via student email accounts, so you should be able to find out what children placed with you are expected to do.

You can help by:

• Establishing a routine, have homework completed at a set point each evening, whether it is when they first come in from school, or straight after you have eaten.

• Making space for them, somewhere quiet with no distractions. This could be through exclusive use of the family room, or at a desk in a bedroom.

• Some activities may involve computer use, either for research or particular tasks, but be sensitive to a screen becoming a means of avoidance.

• Removing distractions, such as mobiles and tablets, unless the homework specifically needs online access. Discuss listening to music, as some people, but not all, find this helps concentration.

• Keeping track of time. If homework is taking too long, talk to the teachers and agree an approach of either having fewer demands placed on the child or young person, or stopping after a specific length of time has passed.

• Discussing it. Find out what they have to do. Take an interest. Offer to help if they get stuck. Look things up together. Give hints, prompts and nudges – but don’t do it for them, otherwise they learn nothing, except how to avoid working.

Remember that school is only one element of education and that there are plenty of rich learning opportunities to be had outside of it. Make sure there is time for these, too.

Having a reward system in place is a fantastic way to encourage them to do their homework. It may be if they do an hour of reading they get a treat and if they carry that on for a week then they earn a trip to their favourite café or restaurant, or get to do their favourite activity.
Keeping children and young people safe in a digital world

It is important for children and young people to benefit from the advances in technology and develop to become confident and competent digital citizens. However, they also need to understand how to use the internet safely, both under supervision and independently.

It is often challenging for parents and carers to keep up with children and young people’s use of technology - what they are doing online, who they are chatting to, what games they are playing and what they are downloading and viewing.

To help children and young people stay safe online the Welsh Government has created an e-safety zone on Hwb⁸ – the national digital repository. This provides resources, news and research about staying safe in the digital space by adopting appropriate behaviours and a positive digital presence. It hosts e-safety resources for all schools to help teachers raise awareness of e-safety issues with parents, carers and pupils.

As a foster carer, each new bit of technology, primarily marketed at the children I care for, is a challenge. It’s easy to worry about how to help young people in the digital world, but embrace it, read up on it and make sure that you’re the one that knows how to safely use the latest technology, so you can teach them a thing or two.

Fostering in a digital world⁹, published by The Fostering Network, provides comprehensive, helpful, and common sense advice to foster carers to safely make the most of digital technologies.

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⁸ hwb.wales.gov.uk/esafety-resources
⁹ www.fosteringresources.co.uk/?cid=1&sid=8&pid=499
Attachment in the classroom: the links between children's early experience, emotional well-being and performance in school

Early childhood experiences will impact on the ability of any child to learn, and to form relationships with peers and adults. Babies and children need a secure emotional relationship with a main caregiver, usually a parent, to grow and develop physically, emotionally and intellectually. Many, but not all, looked after children will not have experienced this fully, moving from one living situation to another, being separated from caregivers and having this crucial attachment disrupted.

Unmet attachment needs can lead to difficulties socially, behaviourally and emotionally, with children perhaps exhibiting defiance, aggression, controlling behaviour, attention seeking, persistent lying or stealing, lack of empathy or conscience, inability to make or keep friends, short concentration span, inability to accept help, and much more.

When the child has experienced neglect, trauma, abuse or loss, these difficulties may be severe.

Take the time to learn as much about your child’s history as possible, so that you can see how differently the world might appear to them.

The ways in which these attachment difficulties manifest can often prove challenging for school staff to deal with. You can help by ensuring they recognise the signs in children and implement closely targeted support strategies. Even making small allowances can make a big difference to a child's life and, in turn, their time at school.
Good practice tips - Working with children and young people with attachment difficulties

Changing teachers or schools can disrupt relationships that have particular meaning for children or young people. Support the school in thinking about and respecting this when changes are planned. A summary sheet to the educational ‘team’ around the child or young person (including support staff) indicating the main issues, can help – although be sensitive to what information should be kept confidential. Consider, too, what needs to be shared with all staff, such as lunchtime supervisors and supply teachers.

There may also be times when parts of the curriculum could cause worry or distress to children who are fostered. Teachers may want to think about activities such as:

- **Creating family trees or histories** – some children may either not have information or not want to share it. Life story work can trigger very strong emotions, as could being asked about memories or being asked to bring in baby or family photos.
- **Sex and Relationships education** – if a child has suffered sexual abuse in their earlier life they may have an unusually early awareness and may make inappropriate comments during lessons.
- **PE and Games** – a child who has been abused may be uncomfortable when required to remove clothing.
- **Reading** – books that deal with loss or death may be distressing, such as *Goodnight Mr. Tom*.
- **PSE** – some topics, for instance focusing on substance misuse, may trigger upsetting memories of trauma and neglect before they came into care.
- **Celebrations** – these may be fraught with difficulty for children who are fostered. For example, being asked to make a Mother’s day card, or being asked what they did during the school holidays can be upsetting.
- **Special events** – both across and within faiths and cultures there can be differences in what is celebrated, and how, and even if. Particular foods, songs, dress and activities may have increased significance, both positive and negative.

*Getting it right for every child* helps schools and parents understand the educational needs of adopted children, although the strategies in the guide describe good practice for all children who may experience attachment issues or exhibit behavioural problems.

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10 www.adoptionuk.org/resources
Finding a mainstream school

Stability is important for looked after children, so unless there are good reasons, it is best for them to continue to attend the school they already go to when they are first placed with you. However, changing school is sometimes unavoidable and this could be because they are:

- Young and haven’t been to school before.
- Newly arrived in the county/country.
- Of an age when they need to move to the next phase.
- At risk in some way and need to be made safe.
- Placed at a distance where it is not practical to continue at the same school.

Some foster carers are often concerned as to whether birth parents have a say in where a child or young person goes to school. The child’s or young person’s placement plan, within the Care and Support Plan, should make clear who has the authority to make decisions about which school a looked after child should attend.

If the child’s or young person’s plan for permanence is for them to return home, then their parents should be involved in deciding which school they should attend, because ultimately they will be living together. Even if the plan for permanence is for a child or young person to remain in a long term placement, their parents retain parental responsibility and should be consulted about choice of school. However, if there is a care order the local authority decides whether it is in the best interests of the child or young person to consult his or her parents.
Admissions

For most children or young people there are specific points at which they will change school, for instance from primary to secondary school. However, there are times when looked after children may need to move during the school year. Generally, the process is managed by the local authority, although applications might be made for an ‘in year’ entrance. Where an admission application on behalf of a looked after child or young person is not referred to the Welsh Ministers, the decision to admit must be notified to the applicant within 10 calendar days and the child or young person must be permitted to take up the place from the next available school day.

Looked after children and young people have priority when it comes to school placements, to the extent that even if a school is full – as it might be in the middle of a school year – it can be instructed to take a child or young person who is looked after, by a Welsh local authority. Similarly, children and young people with Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) can have a specific school named on their statement, which is a statutory document, so they must be given a place.

Although the decision about the school they attend is one taken in conjunction with the social worker, and possibly the parents, and the request for admission will be made by the corporate parent (local authority), you will have a leading role to play. You may well know your local schools, and might even have children that go to them, and you will probably be able to find out what other local parents think of them. Where practicable you should involve the child or young person in the decision, and take them to visit the different schools you are considering.

If a child or young person is in a school place some distance from your home, the transportation arrangements and costs should be set out in the Placement Plan (a plan that forms part of their overarching care plan, and sets out why the placement was chosen and how the placement will contribute to meeting the child’s needs,) and then reviewed at the LAC Review (a regular meeting that brings together those people who are closely concerned with the care of the child you look after) Some children or young people with more complex special educational needs will be provided with specialist transport, such as a bus with a tail-lift for a wheelchair. Your social worker should be able to help you find out more if transport is an issue.
What do you look for in a school?

Of course a school’s results and pupil achievement matter, but they are not the whole story. On the school website you will usually find a summary of any results, a prospectus (or you could phone and ask for one) and details of various polices. You might also want to read the last Estyn inspection report\(^\text{11}\). The reports contain a lot of information and a visit to the school will give you a clearer indication of its core values. Here are some things to think about when you visit the school:

- You might want to know if people care about the school. Does it need a lick of paint? Is it clean? Is there graffiti on the walls? Are the displays fresh and engaging? What is the state of the toilets?
- Does it feel open and inviting? Are classroom doors kept open? Do children and young people stop working and stare as you walk in? Do people smile and say ‘hello’ as you walk around? Do pupils help show visitors around? Are there students standing outside classrooms?
- What are the resources like? Are things a bit tatty? Is the whiteboard faded and hard to see? Are the computers old and in need of replacement? Are there enough of them? Are the specialist facilities, such as labs and art rooms, well equipped?
- How do they support children and young people who are new to the school? Is there a buddy system? Can they start part-time? Will they contact you regularly, even when things are going well?
- Discuss the SEN and pastoral systems with the school – are they appropriate for the child? Do the extra-curricular activities include ones he or she will want to get involved in?
- And do they sound like they want them to attend? Do they take an interest in the child? Do they talk in a positive and welcoming way?
- Ask to meet with the designated teacher for looked after children at the school. They can liaise with other staff, advocate on behalf of the child and put things in place to help. Ask what they will do to promote your child’s educational aspirations and support their achievements.

www.mylocalschool.gov.uk\(^\text{12}\) is a website designed to provide school performance data for parents and carers who may have an interest in particular schools. The site aims to present information in a clear and simple format and the data is displayed by school. This is to allow the viewer access to a wealth of information from a range of sources about a particular school. The site presents many of the outputs of the education system such as examination performance, but also some of the inputs such as finance. It also allows instant access to the most recent Estyn report for your local school.

There is a lot to think about, but getting the right school can be crucial to the child or young person’s current and future happiness.

\(^{11}\) www.estyn.gov.wales/

\(^{12}\) mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/
Starting a new school

Before they get to their new school, whether it is their first or several more than that, you can help them to prepare. Where possible involve them in shopping for school clothes and uniform, and equipment such as pens, pencils, and folders. Talk to them about their expectations, and try to identify an adult they can approach with their concerns, such as their form tutor or class teacher, or the designated teacher in the school.

You may need to accompany them for the first few days, and even negotiate a part-time timetable for them – no matter what age they are - until they have settled in. Contact the designated teacher in the school to discuss how they can best support the transition.

Make a clear expectation that they will attend school, but you will support them fully in making a success of it, and in dealing with any problems that arise.

When a child or young person is moving school, their current school is always expected to provide information to the new school, whether they are looked after or not. Usually, the child or young person’s file will be transferred electronically from the current school to the new one. All past Personal Education Plan (PEP) reviews will be included in the file.

When a child or young person is looked after, it is the responsibility of teachers in both schools to liaise so that all information about the child or young person, especially that which may not be on their file, is transferred. For example, if the child or young person has been attending one school for a number of years, the school is likely to have developed specific strategies for dealing with aspects of the child or young person’s social, emotional and behavioural development. It is important that the teachers of the current school pass these on to the new school, so that time is not wasted getting to know the child or young person's strengths and weaknesses before such strategies are put in place.

When a looked after child is making the transition from primary to secondary school, it is good practice for the designated teacher of the secondary school to attend the Year 6 summer term Personal Education Plan meeting to meet the child and their foster carer, and to discuss the needs of the child and the support they will need with transition. For the looked after child, who are likely to find this change very difficult, it is good practice for the secondary designated teacher to invite the child to visit the school, to get to know its geography and meet some of the new teachers. This is in addition to the usual new intake day for all incoming young people. Where secondary schools run summer camps for new pupils, looked after children should be given priority.

Most universities offer outreach services to young people aged 14-years onwards. This may seem too early to be thinking about options, but outreach can help with motivation and planning for the future if the young person knows what might be available. Outreach describes the activities and support that an institution offers to encourage young people to apply to study in higher education in general, and with them in particular, along with the support that they may offer to help with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application process. To find out what different universities or colleges offer, it’s better to contact them directly. There are a number of ways to do this. Take a look at the information on their website. Try typing into an internet search engine the name of the university care leaver to help find pages on their website about what they offer.
School trips
Learning outside of school can provide valuable experiences. If confirmed in the delegation authority statement, ordinarily consent to attend these will rest with you, but you must keep the social worker informed. If the proposed trip is overnight, or abroad, you may find that it is the social worker who will be responsible for giving permission. Keep them informed and give as much notice as possible in case there are delays.

Extra-curricular activities
Extra-curricular activities are an important part of school life and looked after children or young people should be encouraged to join in. Most group activities have a common theme such as winning a match or giving a performance. Taking part enables children and young people to develop key life skills – teamwork, leadership and communication. It also enables them to gain confidence, motivation and aspirations. Finally, bringing together children and young people who share the same interests, enables strong friendships to be developed. As a foster carer, encourage your child or young person to join in these activities.
Enrichment

Successful Futures emphasises the importance of rich experiences being integral to the curriculum and to deep learning. As part of the development of the new curriculum, schools are being asked to work with a wide range of partners, to develop a breadth of opportunities and activities that expand horizons within and beyond the traditional learning environment of the classroom. Key to this is about finding more effective ways to deliver the curriculum, communicate high expectations, raising an individual’s aspirations and ambitions to succeed in everything they choose to do.

The Children in Need Census for 2015 shows that around two thirds of looked after children in Wales have some sort of special educational need. This is above the Welsh national average of 22% of the general school population. Most of these children will be in mainstream schools, although 9% of LAC are in special schools (compared to under 1% of the general population) and 13% have a disability.

**What is SEN?**

Schools work within a framework called The SEN Code of Practice for Wales. This states that a child or young person has a special educational need if “they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age,” or “have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of the educational facilities provided for children of the same age.” The outcome is that they need, ‘special provision made for them.’ This applies for children who have yet to start school, too.

Whilst there are no general set standards that a child or young person has to meet to be considered to have SEN, there will be certain signs and/or traits that a child or young person with a specific type of SEN may demonstrate, that would help to identify them as having SEN. Teachers are well placed to identify when a child is having more difficulty in learning than their peers and to consider if that child may have SEN.

It is important to note that not all children or young people with disabilities or medical conditions will also have SEN, and that having a different first language is not considered a special educational need.

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How are children identified as having SEN?

Within the school, a class teacher may have concerns about a child’s progress and would discuss this with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). This may result in an assessment of some sort, perhaps an observation by the SENCO, or a meeting to look over their work. Or it could involve a referral to an educational psychologist or other professionals, such as a literacy specialist.

Highlighting learning challenges you have observed could make the difference between a child having a meaningful time at school, or just turning up every day. You should also share this information with the child’s social worker, and ensure that it is recorded in the next LAC Review/PEP.

If you are unsure what to say or do, you can seek support from a social worker or your local authority advice service.

The Personal Education Plan (PEP) is the most important instrument to make sure that the child in your care receives the support they are entitled to. If it’s finished to a high standard it has the potential to open numerous doors and make sure the child gets the very best out of their education.
Responding to behaviours

The most frequent types of SEN associated with looked after children are emotional and behavioural difficulties. Certain behaviours can act as a mask for other issues, or a means of conveying problems that the child or young person hasn’t found a means of communicating.

When a child or young person exhibits a behaviour problem it is always worth investigating a little further to find causes other than those that are initially presented. Being understanding and sympathetic with the child or young person is a better approach than trying to enforce good behaviour. Counselling can also be helpful to help children or young people deal with difficult feelings, supporting them if they feel worried, frightened or confused. Local authorities have to ensure that counselling is available to Year 6 pupils and all 11 to 18 year-olds in their area.

I was concerned that Sam had special educational needs. In order to get them diagnosed, I spoke to Sam’s social worker and the designated teacher at his school to highlight and explain my concerns. I also shared my feelings at his PEP meeting. They all then worked with the school’s special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) to determine his needs and how the school could best work to support him.
How are SEN met?

There are three levels of support in schools, beyond usual classroom practices such as grouping children and young people in different ways for different lessons, and giving work of differing degrees of difficulty across the classroom. These are known as differentiation.

- **School Action** – Interventions that are additional to or different from those provided as part of the school’s differentiated curriculum. This could include access to equipment, group working or individual support.

- **School Action Plus** – The point at which external support services are used, such as an educational psychologist or speech therapist, to see the child or young person and advise teachers on appropriate strategies for intervention, or in some cases provide specific support for particular activities.

- **Statement of Special Educational Needs** – This is a legal document that details a child or young person’s learning needs following a statutory assessment, and the provision necessary to meet them.

The Education Act 1996 specifies that children with SEN should normally be educated in mainstream schools, so long as this is compatible with receiving the special educational provision that their learning difficulty calls for; the efficient education of other children and young people, and the efficient use of resources.

Some schools may have specialist units, sometimes called resource bases, attached to them, for instance for deaf or hearing impaired children and young people, or those with autistic spectrum conditions, where children and young people spend some of their time in mainstream classes. But many will follow a mainstream timetable, perhaps with additional support, and often working in small group or one-to-one settings, to focus on their particular learning needs as part of their revised curriculum.

Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) are a type of school, established and maintained by the local authority, that provide education for children and young people who require alternative educational provision. Local authorities have a duty to provide suitable education for children and young people of compulsory school age who, because of illness or exclusion from school, for example, will not receive a suitable education without these arrangements.

Many children and young people attending PRUs have been permanently excluded and some are at risk of exclusion. The focus of PRUs is to get pupils back into a mainstream school. PRUs are diverse in terms of the number and type of pupils catered for, the typical length of the stay, arrangements for admission and transfer to other education, and the nature of the curriculum and length of the school day. For more information please refer to the pupil referral unit guidance 15.

Not all children and young people in PRUs have a Statement. Depending on the age of the child or young person, attendance at a PRU should ideally only be short term, before the child or young person returns to the mainstream school.

Whether a Statement is issued or not, the school or PRU should make sure that they are meeting the child or young person’s learning needs. This may be with additional support, specialist lessons, using ICT, working in small groups, or providing additional services, such as counselling, speech therapy or music therapy.

For all children and young people with SEN there should be an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in place. This sets out short term learning goals along with the resources necessary to meet them and should be reviewed and revised at least twice a year. This is different from a Personal Education Plan (PEP) as it is more focused on particular learning needs.

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15 [gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/schoolsandpru/?lang=en](gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/schoolsandpru/?lang=en)
What can you do to help?
If a school considers a child or young person in your care to have SEN they should inform you and ask for your perspective. This discussion should be on-going as the situation is reviewed and plans and strategies updated. You will have valuable insights into the child’s or young person’s character, interests and strengths.

You will also be able to help reinforce the learning goals from the Individual Education Plan (IEP). For instance, by reading with a child, going over letter sounds, or pointing out words to them as you walk along the street. You might also help with behavioural goals, such as turn taking, waiting patiently or asking them to phrase things correctly. There could also be vocabulary or speech patterns to practice.

To be most useful there needs to be regular communication between classroom and home, perhaps by using a notebook or email, so you and the teacher can exchange messages. Homework diaries are an excellent way of maintaining contact with the school and getting written feedback. Many schools now have an e-learning platform, with a parent/carer section, as a way of keeping up the information flow. If you don’t feel confident with new technologies ask the school for a demonstration.

Close communication between the school and the team around the child or young person, especially with the foster carer and the social worker, is essential for successful educational outcomes.

As a foster carer, you should never be shy of communicating with the school outside of formal meetings, in advocating and in challenging others to promote the achievement of your looked after child. Contact the school’s designated teacher on a regular basis to check things are going well – don’t wait to be contacted by the school.
If there is a problem

If you are worried that a child or young person’s SEN are not being addressed then there are a number of things you can do, working alongside the child’s social worker and the looked after children’s education co-ordinator (LACE). First of all, raise it with the school through the designated teacher. You might need to follow this up by meeting with the class or form teacher and the SENCO.

If this concern isn’t resolved through discussions with the teacher, then a formal complaint to the governing body should be made. Should things remain unresolved then all local authorities will have a disagreement resolution service you can take your concerns to. (See next chapter.)

Post-16

The end of compulsory education need not mean that additional support for learning ends too. If a young person remains within the school education system, in the sixth form of a mainstream or special school, the SEN support up to the age of 19 should continue. If they move on to a sixth form or FE college these should have appropriate support services set up, although they may function differently. Some students that go on to FE or HE can be assessed for a Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), or be eligible for other grants or bursaries, to help them complete their course.

Statement of Special Educational Needs (SSEN)

A Statement is a legally binding document that details a child or young person’s learning needs and the provision necessary to meet them, including the school they should attend. For further information refer to the SEN Code of Practice for Wales.

If a local authority decides not to conduct a Statutory Assessment, issue a Statement, or if you are unhappy with the contents of either Parts 2, 3 and/or 4 of the Statement, then you will have a right to appeal to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales (SENTW). If you feel that this is necessary then discuss with child’s social worker to agree the most appropriate way forward. For further information please visit the website.\[16\]

More information is available\[17\] for parents and carers of children and young people who may have special educational needs.

\[16\] sentw.gov.wales/?skip=1&lang=en
Attendance and punctuality

It is a legal requirement that children and young people attend school regularly and on time. Time out of the classroom can mean they miss important lessons, even ten minutes can mean they miss the introduction to an activity and so don’t know what to do. Poor school attendance can often lead to children and young people failing to take advantage of opportunities in later life.

Truancy can impact on a child and young person’s future. Truancy matters because:

- Children and young people who skip school don’t do as well in tests, assessments and exams.
- If your child or young person does not turn up for lessons, these missed sessions in school can add up and can really impact on achievement/attainment over a school life.
- Being out of school during school hours gives your child or young person time to kill - and research has shown that this can lead to criminal or anti-social behaviour.
- Missing lessons can result in children and young people failing to develop the necessary skills which they later rely on in adulthood, such as learning multiplication in mathematics.
- Children and young people miss out on opportunities which aid their personal and social development.

As a foster carer, it’s your responsibility to make sure they attend school on a regular basis, and if they don’t, to make sure that they get the support they need. If the truancy is regular, a meeting should be called without delay between the foster carer, social worker and school, with the possible involvement of the education welfare officer, to discuss possible causes and prevention.
The important factor here is that there is documented evidence that you as a foster carer have actively sought to address the issue and have attempted to work positively with other professionals. Despite not being legally responsible for the looked after child, fixed penalty notices are applicable to foster carers as well parents.

Truancy is more likely to happen in secondary schools, but even young children can feign illness to avoid going to school. A pattern of missing school can develop for a number of reasons including anxiety with settling in, bullying, stress around school work and unhappiness about their family situation.

There are several things you can do to support a child or young person who is taking time out of school. Get to know their school week and the lessons/teachers they feel most comfortable with, and those they do not. Look for patterns in times when they are trying to avoid school. Are they doing homework? Missing a deadline can cause a child or young person to feel anxious and this can lead to the deliberate choice to miss a lesson. They may be avoiding a particular teacher or subject. Talk to them regularly and ask about lessons they don’t like and why. Make as many positive links with the school as possible and check your foster child’s school routine regularly. Maybe they are not doing their homework and want to avoid confrontation? Or they are self-conscious in PE?

It could also be an issue in the streets or on the bus, bullying for instance. They may need to change route, get a lift, or arrange to meet friends to travel with.

If you do find that your foster child has truanted, then make sure you, and your child, understand why. If a student is anxious then they may need support in analysing what is the root of the problem; otherwise, it can turn into ‘everything’ and ‘I just hate school’. It is important that you work with the school to find out what support is available; it may be that mentoring is a possibility, or the school runs a buddy scheme which could really help your foster child work through their concerns or problems. A good school will be really keen to address issues and to ensure that all students are attending regularly and making sustained progress.
Exclusion

All schools should have a policy which promotes good behaviour and prevents poor behaviour. Policies should be based on clear values, such as respect and fairness, and set out how rewards and sanctions are used to encourage positive behaviour and regular attendance.

A school’s decision to exclude a child or young person for a defined period or permanently, should be a last resort and it is only the headteacher, or an agreed representative, who can sanction this.

There are three types of exclusions:

- **Internal exclusion** – where a child or young person may be removed from class but not excluded from the school premises. The exclusion could be to a designated area within the school, under supervision, or to another class on a temporary basis. This does not count as a formal exclusion.

- **A fixed term exclusion** – which will normally be for a short period of one to three days. A child or young person can be excluded for one or more fixed-terms not exceeding 45 school days in any one school year. Individual exclusions should be for the shortest time necessary, bearing in mind that exclusions of more than a day or two make it more difficult for the child or young person to reintegrate into the school.

- **Permanent exclusion** – this is very serious and the child or young person cannot return to that school, unless reinstated by the school’s discipline committee or by an appeal panel.

There are appeal processes and the school must tell parents and carers about these. For longer periods, when the total in a year reaches 45 days, or permanent exclusion, a discipline committee made up of school governors meets to review and agree the decision.
Permanent exclusions can be challenged and children and young people reinstated, although this does not happen often. It may be that relationships have deteriorated too much for a return to be a positive experience.

Schools should be particularly sensitive to exclusion with looked after children. You should be able to access support and advice from your local authority and supervising social worker, and expect that all strategies have been tried to keep your child or young person in school.

Foster carers should challenge exclusion, hold schools to account and advocate other sanctions to be used instead of exclusion. Ask what services are available to help prevent a child or young person being excluded.

If they are excluded from school, you have to make them feel like they would be better going to school. They need to know there are consequences and they still need to do the work that they are missing out on. You can’t let them just play on the Xbox all day.

Making a complaint
As a carer, you will want to work alongside a school for a child’s benefit. However, there may be an occasion when you are not happy with a process or incident at school. Raising this informally in the first instance will often resolve the situation. Make sure you direct your issue to the appropriate teacher and be clear about how you would like the issue resolved.

However, there are times when you may want to go through a more structured process and all schools will have a formal complaint policy available, usually on their website. This policy will outline the process and also set out a timescale, which you will need to discuss with a tribunal.

I tried to be objective focusing on the facts of the case rather than personalities. I always made sure that the best interests of the child are at the forefront of the discussion and what the best outcome would be for them. The key thing here is the well-being of your foster child and being clear in the support systems you want in place for them.
Personal Education Plan (PEP)
The PEP is an important tool. Every looked after child must have a PEP, which will be an integral part of their overall care and support plan. The PEP must be initiated before the young person becomes looked after, except in an emergency placement when the PEP should be initiated within 10 working days. The PEP must have been developed and be available for the first statutory review meeting of the care and support plan, 28 days after becoming looked after. The PEP should take a broad view of education, and include consideration of socialisation, skills for life, and learning outside of school, such as attending a sports club or youth group, or following a particular interest, fishing or dancing, perhaps. It should be clear who is responsible for which element of it, and it must be reviewed in partnership with you, the child and the school whenever the care and support plan is reviewed. The child’s views must be taken into account when the plan is developed and reviewed.

Individual Education Plan (IEP)
Children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) will usually have an IEP if their needs are such that they need a more specialist or targeted intervention. They state the learning goals for a child or young person and the resources that will be needed to help them to get there. An IEP is usually drawn up by the SENCO and the class teacher, and the child or young person whenever possible, and sometimes the parents or carers. Whoever is present the result should be shared with you. For children and young people with Statements of SEN (see the chapter on special educational needs). Good practice should focus on an initial planning meeting being called within six weeks of the statement being issued when an IEP is being actioned in response to the assessment.

Depending on the school setting and/or the children and young person’s needs some IEPs are reviewed termly, others six monthly, and sometimes it is annually. Typically they will have only three or four goals, which should be specific and time limited. It is a legal requirement to have a review at least annually.
Annual Review and Transitional Review

Children with statements should have them reviewed at least every 12 months, with no minimum time. The review should consider whether the Statement still reflects the child or young person’s learning needs, or whether they have changed, and if the support provided is still appropriate for meeting those needs. You should be invited to the Annual Review, and asked for your views in advance, as well as the child or young person, who can also expect to have their views recorded.

The review should set the learning objectives until the next one, with these informing the IEP.

In Year 9, the annual review should focus on the next stage of education, and the choice of exam subjects. This may depend upon the chosen career path, so the meeting should include a contribution from a careers guidance worker.

Pastoral Support Programme (PSP)

There are times when a child or young person may be identified as being at risk of permanent exclusion. In such instances, a Pastoral Support Programme (PSP) should be drawn up to try to prevent this happening. This should focus on the behaviour that is putting the child or young person at risk, and include consideration of any SEN, so the SENCO should be consulted when writing it. Other people involved might include an education psychologist, education welfare officer, behaviour support specialist, the designated person and the child’s social worker.

Again, it is good practice to involve the child, and often the parent or foster carer, particularly as a home/school contract might be one strategy that is included.

Overall

It is possible for a looked after child to have a PEP, an IEP and a PSP simultaneously as each serves a separate purpose, although they should be complementary and all work in conjunction with each other with the Care and Support Plan. You should receive copies of any plans and programmes that are drawn up.

All plans should be working documents, that is, they provide agreed strategies and guidance for everyone involved to work to, to ensure that everyone is supporting each other in trying to achieve the best outcomes for the looked after child.
Effective meetings

As a carer of looked after children you will no doubt attend your fair share of meetings. For school age children these will include parents’ evenings and involvement in Personal Education Plans. If the child has SEN this can expand to include review meetings and discussions of their Individual Education Plan (IEP), regardless of whether the child has a statement or not. And, if they are at risk of exclusion there are Pastoral Support Programmes, too.

To get the most from these meetings:

• Be an advocate for the child, a positive voice be clear what the purpose of the meeting is and what outcome you want.
• Take someone with you to help make sure that everything gets covered – and remembered.
• Be prepared. Make a note of what you want to say, and to ask, and how you might deal with any areas of disagreement.
• Look for common ground. The people present will want the child or young person to succeed. Find the things you can agree on and build from there.
• Ask for specific examples, of both good and bad events. Generalisations could arise from stereotyping or prejudice.
• Make sure there is a written record. If no-one is taking minutes send an email yourself afterwards, thanking people for the meeting and the actions they have agreed to take.
• Agree deadlines, monitoring and feedback. How will you know things have changed, who will keep track, and when will you meet again to review the situation and the agreed plans?
• Look for the positives. Even a crisis can be an opportunity to make a change.
Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG)
The Pupil Deprivation Grant (PDG) is made available by the Welsh Government to overcome the additional barriers that prevent children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds achieving their full potential. The PDG is provided to support:

- Children and young people who are eligible for free school meals and who are educated in maintained schools.
- Eligible children and in Early Years settings where the Foundation Phase is delivered.
- Looked after children, and former looked after children who have been adopted from care or who are subject to a special guardianship order or residence order.

The funding relating to the e-FSM (eligible-free school meals) and the Early Years 18 part of the grant is given directly to schools and the funding specifically for looked after children is held and administered by the regional education consortia.

As a foster carer, it may be worth making inquiries with your child’s school to make sure they have the best opportunities supported through the grant.

The Welsh Government’s *What Really Works* guidance provides key information and resources to schools for tackling poverty in education.

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Post-16

Compulsory mainstream schooling stops at the end of June in the school year when a young person is 16, however, most young people continue in some form of education or training until they are at least 18. Options available to young people include continuing into a sixth form, going to a Further Education (FE) college, or it could be through an apprenticeship or a traineeship which is designed to develop skills and help young people progress into employment.

Many young people will be on a route that has been plotted since before they made their GCSE choices at 14. For those in care, thinking about choices after 16 should be part of the development of a pathway plan. Young people need to understand the range of choices available to them from the age of 16, which include taking A Levels and then going into higher education (HE), or a vocational or work-based route. This choice should reflect the young person’s abilities, interests and aspirations.

As our foster child moves towards independence their social worker will work with them to create a Pathway Plan which includes their long term aspirations and career goals. As a foster carer, I work with the young person’s social worker to make sure the plan reflects what the young person wants to do with their life. It should set out in detail what support the local authority will provide. Sometimes if it’s not written down it might be difficult to access the agreed support later on.
For young people in care, forward planning is extremely important. Details of their chosen route should be recorded in the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and the subsequent Pathway Plan (16 plus). If a fostered young person is thinking about going to college, university or an apprenticeship, make sure that this is noted in both plans. This is essential to ensure that they get funding and support. Local authorities have a legal duty to support young people making the transition from care to adulthood.

The Pathway Plan sets out the activities and support for any looked after young person planning to move to independent living and is based on their care plan. It is a document drawn up by the responsible local authority, along with the young person, and states the manner in which the local authority proposes to meet the young person’s needs.

The Pathway Plan needs to be aspirational and led by the young person to ensure that it remains relevant and focused on achieving the best outcomes for them over time.

As well as mainstream colleges there are many specialist colleges which can offer residential or day places for children and young people with more complex SEN. Such colleges often provide learning in life skills or work experience based courses. Such placements can take a long time to plan so make sure that the team around the child make enquiries as much in advance as possible.

Right from the beginning, our Pathway Plans have focused on university….we were always told about the available support. Everyone – our social workers, the leaving care team – have been behind our dream.

Tim, care leaver and undergraduate, interviewed by The Who Cares Trust (2011)
Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is an income-assessed weekly allowance of £30 to help students with the cost of further education. It is paid every two weeks directly into the student’s bank account.

It provides young people, who wish to continue in education after school leaving age, with an incentive to earn awards through good attendance and achieving agreed objectives.

Receipt of EMA will not affect any benefits which are currently paid to your household. For further details about EMA please visit the website.²⁰

When I Am Ready

Where the young person in care will live in the future will be part of the pathway planning, the drafting of which should start at age 16. Once they turn 18 they are no longer a child in care but an adult. When I Am Ready recognises that continued stability can be essential to achievement. It is a way for an agreement to be made under which a young person, although no longer legally in care, can continue to live with foster carers, usually until at least 21, and sometimes beyond, particularly where they have yet to complete a course such as a degree.

The Fostering Network has published a guide for members – Frequently asked questions about When I am Ready: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers.²¹

The Welsh Government has published good practice guidance for the When I am Ready scheme. The guidance is to be read in conjunction with the statutory Code of Practice relating to Part 6 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The guide has been written primarily for practitioners involved in making and supporting arrangements for young people leaving care. The guide supplements the statutory Code of Practice relating to Part 6 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The code sets out a local authority’s legal responsibilities in respect of post-18 living arrangements for young people in foster care. The guidance contains clear information about how fostering services should support foster carers financially. For more information visit When I am Ready – Good Practice Guide - March 2016.²²

²⁰ www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe/information-for-parents/education-maintenance-allowance.aspx
²² gov.wales/topics/health/publications/socialcare/guidance1/ready/?lang=en
Educational choices Post-16

On completing compulsory education, most young people will have a number of GCSEs. What they choose to do next will depend on a number of factors, including their abilities and interests; most sixth forms and colleges will have entry requirements (often five GCSEs at grade C or above) to do A Levels or an equivalent course. Other options include BTEC Diplomas and Access to Higher Education courses. However, there is also a wide range of choices at lower levels which can be ideal for young people who may need more support, particularly with literacy and numeracy, or who are not sure what they want to do. Some sixth forms and all FE colleges offer these options and there is also a specific work-based learning programme, ‘traineeships’, which offers more tailored support to help prepare young people for work. These programmes can help young people who may not have achieved good qualifications at GCSE to catch up and to learn new skills. Basic work and life skills, such as writing a CV and interview skills, are often part of these courses.

Every college has a member of staff, usually a manager, who is responsible for ensuring that care leavers are supported. This will usually include making them aware of financial and learning support which can help them to stay in learning and achieve their goals. Young people can be reluctant to tell their college that they are a care leaver, because they are worried about being seen as ‘different’ from their peers; but doing so can help to ensure that they get the support they need. Colleges will respect the young person’s privacy and make sure that their information is kept in confidence.
Youth Engagement and Progression Framework

The Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF) has been developed to support those at risk of not making a positive transition when they leave school. The framework brings together key elements of effective practice, proven to help deliver positive outcomes for young people and provides a systematic mechanism for local authorities to identify those in need of support, establish the support available, and to track progress of young people as they make the transition from compulsory education into further education, training or employment. Each local authority has put in place an Engagement and Progression Co-ordinator (EPC). The EPC plays a critical role in implementing the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework. They work closely with Careers Wales to provide the operational leadership needed to identify the level of risk of young people and the specific support needed to help them make a positive progression.

As part of the YEPF Welsh Government run regular regional working groups with key stakeholders including: Local authority EPCs, Careers Wales, FE, NTfW, Regional Education Consortia, schools and the Third Sector. In order to address the issue of LAC (looked after children) becoming NEET we invited the LACE Coordinators and PDG Coordinators to the January 2016 regional groups, in order to discuss the issues that LAC young people face and their transition from compulsory education into further education, training or employment. These meetings will be held annually.

Going on to university

Getting a degree can add to future opportunities. Some courses are tailored for particular professions, such as medicine, teaching or engineering, whilst others are more open, psychology, mathematics or english, perhaps. Attending open days in summer and autumn terms can help with deciding where to apply to when it comes to completing the UCAS form and submitting it early in the New Year.
In my experience, the transition to university for care leavers with a detailed Pathway Plan is much better than those without. Ideally, a Pathway Plan should include what financial support the local authority will provide for the duration of the course, their accommodation options in vacation period and any other supporting needs. By discussing these issues and having it in the Pathway Plan, the young person knows where they stand before they start their course and can plan better for their future.

23 www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/systemfiles/content/higher-education-toolkit-wales.pdf
How you can help

Many young people find making decisions about their future difficult. You can help them by making sure they are well informed when they come to decide. This might include accompanying them on open days or to interviews, getting them to talk to people who are already doing a job or studying for a particular qualification, and helping to plan things such as budgets and accommodation.

They might want to find out:

• What choices are available, including A Levels, vocational courses and apprenticeships?
• What is the content of a course? Are all the topics of interest to them?
• What qualifications do they need to get on it? What careers could the qualification lead to?
  How long will the young person need to study before being able to get a job in their area of interest?
• How is it taught? Are there lectures, workshops and lessons, or will they have to do a lot of studying for themselves? Is there a lot of practical learning or is it more based on theory?
• What do those already on the course think of it?
• What financial support is available to support costs like travel or textbooks?
• What extra support is available to help with any learning difficulties, literacy or numeracy, or with personal problems? Does the school or college have a counsellor?
• If the young person is considering an apprenticeship, what are the rates of pay? Is there overtime?
  What is the holiday entitlement?
• Are the studying/working hours flexible?
• What are the possibilities for promotion or gaining professional qualifications?
And finally...

Whilst we may want every child to leave school with a broad range of qualifications and a place at university, or an exciting job lined up, for some this will prove elusive. However, there is still a lot to be gained from time in school. It is also about developing an appreciation of learning, a positive attitude not only towards the process of acquiring skills and knowledge, but also the confidence and belief that it is something you can do. Even without qualifications they may have found out what it takes to be a child or young person, something they can call on later in life.

School can offer stability at times of uncertainty, in a life of highly disruptive ups and downs, moves and transfers, unfinished plans and broken promises. It may also provide the chance to socialise, to make friends, and to learn to deal with adults who are consistent and committed, trusting and trustworthy.

Then there are the activities and experiences that might not be found easily elsewhere. Such as:

- Playing in a sports team.
- Performing in a choir.
- Visiting landmarks and museums.
- Acting in a show.
- Going to the theatre.
- Learning an instrument.
- Undertaking work experience.
- Getting careers advice.
- Learning about the world at work.

In many ways, the education received in school, and the opportunities it opens up in later life are much more than the narrow ones of how many exams are passed and at what grades. These are important, but if we only focus on them we may miss many other lessons learnt. One of the greatest services we can do for children in our care is to help them recognise and appreciate the full breadth of their achievements, and encourage them to continue to draw on them even when school days are a distant memory.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Level</td>
<td>Standard qualification in sixth forms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Disorder.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual Review</td>
<td>Statutory meeting held at least once a year to review a Statement of Special Educational Needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASC/ASD</td>
<td>Autistic Spectrum Conditions/Disorders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BESD</td>
<td>Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BTEC</td>
<td>Vocationally oriented qualification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAMHS</td>
<td>Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDC</td>
<td>Child Development Team, a specialist health provision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Code of Practice</td>
<td>Framework for meeting children and young people SEN.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designated teacher</td>
<td>A member of school staff responsible for looked after children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>Educational Psychologist – assess and advise on children and young person’s learning difficulties.</td>
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<td>EMA</td>
<td>Education Maintenance Allowance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>FE</td>
<td>Further Education. Education provisions after 16 generally offering vocationally oriented courses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>Most common type of exam taken in Year 11 at the end of compulsory education.</td>
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<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education. An establishment that offers degree level courses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Individual Education Plan - Plan for children and young people with SEN that specifies what is to be learnt.</td>
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<td>IRO</td>
<td>Independent Reviewing Officer, a senior social worker who monitors the placement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>Key Stages – Four time periods that a child’s school career is broken up into.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Local authority.</td>
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<td>LAC</td>
<td>Looked after children.</td>
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<td>LACE</td>
<td>Looked after children education co-ordinator. A specialist who works with both education and social services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSA</td>
<td>Learning Support Assistant (also TA and SNA).</td>
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<td>PEP</td>
<td>Personal Education Plan (For looked after children).</td>
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<td>PSP</td>
<td>Pastoral Support Programme.</td>
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<td>PRU</td>
<td>Pupil Referral Unit.</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs.</td>
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<td>SENCO</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator – member of school staff co-ordinating SEN provision.</td>
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<td>SNA</td>
<td>Special Needs Assistant – See Teaching Assistant.</td>
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<td>SNAP</td>
<td>Welsh SEN advice service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement of Special Educational Needs (SSEN)</td>
<td>A statutory document laying out a child’s educational needs and the provision necessary to meet them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant – Generic name for additional adults in classrooms who support children’s learning.</td>
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Resources

**Safer Caring: a new approach**
This book includes practical guidance, real life case studies and thought provoking discussion. Key concepts are explored, including delegated authority and attachment, as well as the role of the wider fostering team.

**Thrive**
This magazine, published by The Fostering Network Wales, provides information and guidance to young people in foster care. A special edition of this magazine shares the findings of research undertaken by CASCADE focused on their educational experiences.

**Fosterline Wales**
The Fostering Network is able to provide unrivalled bilingual information, advice and support to foster carers and other professionals. We operate the free bilingual Fosterline Wales helpline, open from 9.30am – 12.30pm daily. Call 0800 316 7664.

**Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children in Wales.**
In January 2015, the Welsh Government commissioned a study on looked after children and young people (LACYP) and education. CASCADE completed the research: *Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children* in Wales.

**The Fostering Excellence Programme (2016-2019)**
Fostering Excellence, funded by the Welsh Government, is an exciting new programme from The Fostering Network Wales which will deliver a 3-year programme of interventions, aimed to improve the life chances of looked after children and young people in Wales.

The programme, funded by Welsh Government, focuses on principles of a stronger voice and more control, a more skilled workforce and improved access to information, advice and assistance. It will bring together seven, integrated work streams that will include delivery of Fostering Achievement education masterclasses.

These masterclasses will bring our pioneering, externally evaluated Fostering Achievement model to benefit children across Wales, enabling foster carers, teachers and social workers to gain the skills, competence and confidence needed to help inspire and equip children to fulfil their potential. The classes will focus on stability, emotional health and well-being, all essential for children to learn and achieve. Our key innovation of this programme will be to ensure continuity of support for well-being and learning between home and school.

For more information about how you can be involved in the Fostering Excellence programme, please email maria.boffey@fostering.net

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The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK’s leading fostering charity. We are passionate about the difference foster care makes to children and young people. Transforming children’s lives is at the heart of everything we do.

To find out more about our work in Wales, please contact:

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The Fostering Network is registered in England and Wales as a limited company, no. 1507277. Registered office 87 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HA. Registered charity no. 280852 in England and Wales and no. SCO39338 in Scotland.

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