

Protocol for Children in the Care of Oxfordshire County Council and arrangements for the foster carers initiating a move of school or anticipating time off from school

The underlying principles of this protocol are:

- The Council act as corporate parents and as such advocate for children in their care to maximise their educational potential
- Children are best placed in a good or outstanding school or an equivalent education setting to maximise this potential
- Children in care need stability in school and placement to realise potential
- The views of the Virtual School Headteacher must be sought and taken account of as to the suitability of each school it is proposed a child in care should attend.

This protocol is to be operated as follows:

For anticipated absence from school (this includes for holidays)

1. Social workers will add this protocol to the placement plan which delegates short-term day-to-day decisions to the foster carers. If there is one day anticipated absence from school, foster carers can make this decision without the request process as laid out below. They will need to notify the school and get permission from the Headteacher.
2. If there is anticipated two consecutive school days or more absence from school a request for permission for this absence and the reasons behind the request will need to be made in writing from the foster carers to the Corporate Parenting Manager and the Virtual School Headteacher, or their line manager, for approval. This should be done no later than two working weeks before the first day of absence requested.
3. The foster carers must also approach the school's Headteacher to seek permission and their views about the anticipated absence at least two weeks before the first day's absence (or in accordance with school policy if a longer period is required).
4. If for an urgent and unexpected reason for absence from school is required, foster carers will still need to approach the Headteacher and social worker at the first possible moment and the social worker make an urgent request to the Corporate Parenting Manager and the Virtual School Headteacher
5. After due consultation with the Virtual School Headteacher, school Headteacher and social care team, the corporate parenting manager will make a decision as to the appropriateness of the absence requested. Due consideration will be made as to the educational benefits or otherwise of time absent from school. Approval will only be granted in exceptional circumstances such as bereavement or funerals but not for holidays. The Corporate Parenting Manager and Virtual School Headteacher will communicate their decision to all parties within 10 working days of receiving the request.
6. If either the Headteacher or Corporate Parenting Manager declines the request the foster carer should ensure the child attends school.

For moving schools during the school year

1. It is in the best interests of children in care if they only move schools rarely during their school career and then only during the summer holiday. If this is adhered to, discussion with the social worker about the move will take a normal process and a suitable school will be found after consultation with the Virtual School Headteacher.
2. If there is a need to move during the school year the impact of the move on the academic achievement of the child will be the main consideration. A request should be made in writing as early as possible (at least a month in advance) to the Corporate Parenting Manager. Unless exceptional circumstances are given, permission will only be given for the move during a holiday period.
3. After due consultation with the Virtual School Headteacher, school Headteacher and social care team, the Corporate Parenting Manager will make a decision as to the appropriateness of the timing of the school move. Due consideration will be made as to the educational benefits or otherwise of requests that are exceptional circumstances as described in 2. The Corporate Parenting Manager will communicate their decision to all parties within 10 working days of receiving the request. Any dispute that cannot be resolved between the Area Service Manager and Corporate Parenting Manager will be escalated to the Director for resolution.
4. It will be up to the foster carers to make sure that arrangements are made for the child in care to remain at the school until a holiday period if this is required.

Decision

Oct 2019
To be reviewed Dec 2021