

St John and St James' C of E Primary School

Policy for Supporting Adopted Children



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NOTE: Throughout this policy, the term 'adopted children' will be used, but the policy refers to all permanently placed children in adoptive families and in Special Guardianships.

1. Our Aims

St John and St James Primary School has a real and deep concern for each individual, rooted in our Christian ethos which is based on our belief that all people are created and loved by God. We aim that all children feel valued and each pupil is given the very best chance of personal and educational development. Our school is a place where all pupils are cared for and trusted, and where they learn to care for and trust one other.

Children who are permanently placed (i.e. living with adoptive families or special guardians) will have experienced grief and loss, and many of them will have had traumatic experiences in their early lives. These experiences can have a lasting impact, affecting them for many years after adoption.

Our aim is that all permanently placed children at our school feel safe, are happy, and able to learn.

We ensure that this happens by carefully monitoring their progress, including:

- their social and emotional needs;
- their mental health and wellbeing;
- their learning.

Our aim is to provide any specific support they may need to address their needs.

2. Name and Role of Designated Teacher

We have a Designated Teacher with lead responsibility for adopted and other permanently placed children. This role is held by **Bridget Learmouth**.

The Designated Teacher acts as a key contact for families and coordinates the support and provision made for adopted and other permanently placed children in school. The Designated Teacher can be contacted through the school office (020 8985 2045).

Our Pastoral Manager is **Dionne Khaleel**, and our Family Support Worker is **Sharon Rees**. Miss Khaleel oversees the well-being of our children, and runs many of the small groups. Miss Rees works closely with our families, and is also involved with the one-to-one nurture of some of our pupils.

Mrs Smith (Head of School), Mrs Learmouth, Miss Khaleel and Miss Rees meet every week to review the provision in place for our vulnerable pupils, to ensure their needs are met and they flourish in our school.

3. Priority Admissions

All children adopted from care or leaving care under Special Guardianship Orders have priority admission to mainstream schools. Our school's admission procedures are on our website and are administered by Hackney Learning Trust. Please see Hackney Learning Trust website for more information about this.

4. The Adoption-Friendly Schools' Charter

The school has completed a six-month Adoption-Friendly Schools Project, led by PAC-UK, the Agency for Adoption and Permanency Support. We endeavour to ensure that our practice at St John and St James supports our adopted children, and children who have experienced trauma. As an adoption-friendly school, we work hard to:

- (1) Identify children's needs
- (2) Prioritise relationships
- (3) Respond empathically to behaviour
- (4) Work in partnership with parents
- (5) Share information sensitively and effectively
- (6) Reflect and protect adoptive families
- (7) Support our staff
- (8) Use our resources wisely

5. Identifying children's needs

We recognise that adopted children may have needs in the following areas:

- Coping with change and transitions (e.g. end of term, end of year, school trips, change of teachers, moving around the school);
- Coping with unstructured parts of the day;
- Managing at triggering times of the year (e.g. birthdays, contact with birth family);
- Understanding and managing their feelings;
- Managing their behaviour, which results from their emotional needs;
- Managing curriculum 'hotspots' which may be triggering (e.g. topics related to 'family' or themes of loss or trauma).

We recognise that every child is unique; some children may experience all of these difficulties, while they may not apply to other children. Some children may have more and less settled times during their time at school. We are also aware that children may experience difficulties that we have not foreseen. We acknowledge that parents and guardians know their children best, and encourage you to discuss your child's needs with us.

For some adopted children, the good practice experienced by all our children will be enough to ensure they make good progress. Other children will need more targeted support, such as additional interventions and resources. Some children may need us to work with outside agencies, such as the Speech and Language Therapist, Educational Psychologist, and health professionals at Hackney Ark.

As an adoption-friendly school we aim to:

- Understand the needs of our adopted children, by ensuring all staff (teachers and non-teaching staff) receive regular training on attachment and the impact of early trauma and loss;
- Assess children's social and emotional needs, and put appropriate interventions in place. We help children to develop their play skills and social skills, as well as their thinking and learning skills. We support with peer relationships and social skills by training midday supervisors in setting up and supervising games, providing social skills groups that explicitly

teach and rehearse skills, provide a lunchtime club for pupils who find the playground difficult, and provide a buddy system for children who may need it.

As a school we provide the following support and interventions:

- Support with feeling safe by providing nurture groups and key adults;
- Support with change and transitions by endeavouring to inform pupils and parents in advance about key changes, keep parents informed about unexpected changes, provide good hellos and good goodbyes, and provide enhanced support at end of year transitions;
- Support with the unstructured aspects of the school day by providing Breakfast Club to help children settle into the day, providing lunch club for vulnerable students to touch base with key adults, and providing structure by sharing timetables with parents;
- Support with understanding and managing feelings by having a Pastoral Manager to do individual and small group work on emotional literacy.

6. Prioritising relationships

We understand that most adopted children have been deeply hurt in their early relationships, which affects how they form relationships at school.

As an adoption-friendly school, we aim to:

- provide named members of staff as key adults for children, with quality 1:1 time scheduled into the child's day or week, with particular attention to the times when the child is most vulnerable;
- support the child and family with a team around the child (adoptive parent, teacher, key adult, SENCo);
- ensure that staff interact with all children in a validating and empathic way, so that children experience positive relationships in our school environment;
- ensure that our whole school systems contribute structure, helping the children to feel safe;
- ensure that our whole school systems contribute continuity;
- ensure that our whole school systems contribute nurture.

7. Responding empathetically to behaviour

Thinking of a child as behaving badly disposes you to think of punishment. Thinking of a child as struggling to handle something difficult encourages you to help them through their distress.

Stuart Guest (Headteacher, and parent of adopted children)

As an adoption-friendly school, we aim to:

- understand children's behaviour as communication, and focus on meeting those needs;
- understand what lies behind 'attention-seeking' behaviour;
- understand the limitations of reward-consequence systems;
- critically evaluate our systems for managing behaviour.

We respond to children's behaviour by:

- building children's emotional literacy and emotion regulation skills;
- building staff's capacity to respond to children's strong emotions;
- building the school capacity to support adults with their strong emotions;
- training staff in de-escalation strategies;
- providing opportunities for children to repair and reconnect when necessary.

As a school, we apply our behaviour policy flexibly to best meet the needs of each child e.g. if our school 'Stay on Green' system does not work for an individual child, we will use a different approach.

8. Working in partnership with parents

We endeavour as a school to build strong partnerships with all parents, and have regular parents evenings, parents-in-class events, curriculum workshops and social events. For adopted children a positive relationship between school and home is very important, and we seek to work together to meet the needs of each adopted child.

As an adoption-friendly school, we aim to:

- keep listening to parents;
- set up partnerships with parents, meeting regularly;

- engage parents in drawing a picture of their child's needs;
- engage parents in writing an Individual Education Plan (IEP) of interventions for their child;
- engage parents more broadly with the life of the school;
- communicate when things are going well;
- communicate when things are not going so well;
- understand the needs of families for support;
- signpost parents to other support organisations.

9. **Sharing information sensitively and effectively**

We are aware that information-sharing is complex and may be a key concern for adoptive parents and special guardians. We are also aware that children and young people may have strong views about what they want adults and peers to know or not know. We encourage parents and guardians to share with us the information we need to have in order to understand and support their children. When information is shared with us, we will agree with parents why, how, and with whom we will share the information within school, based on their wishes.

As an adoption-friendly school, we aim to:

- make explicit information-sharing agreements with adoptive families;
- agree the information about the child that is to be shared;
- respect each child's views about information shared;
- safeguard the identity of our adopted children on-line by ensuring we do not post their names or photos on our website;
- ensure that *all* parents are aware that photos and videos of school events are not to be shared on social media. We regularly remind all parents not to post photos or videos of school events on-line.

10. **Reflecting and protecting adoptive families**

In our school there are children from many different family structures. We aim to reflect and celebrate all our families, including those formed through adoption.

As an adoption-friendly school, we aim to:

- include adoptive families when discussing the theme of families;
- inspire our classes with stories of famous adopted people;
- be aware of curriculum hot-spots, such as family trees, autobiographies, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas, sex education, special assemblies e.g. Barnardos

Parents receive a half-termly newsletter from each class teacher, outlining the curriculum to be covered. We ask parents to inform us of any potential triggers we may be unaware of, but that they may see coming.

We also aim to protect our adopted children from stigma and bullying, and our anti-bullying policy is on-line and available from school.

11. Supporting our staff

Adopted children can face many challenges at school, and having a staff team with a good understanding of their needs can make a real difference.

As an adoption-friendly school, we aim to:

- provide initial training for all our staff in attachment, trauma and loss;
- have on-going staff training in attachment, trauma and loss;
- ensure that training leads to a change in practice.

We also acknowledge that working with adopted children can be challenging for staff on a professional and personal level. Therefore, as an adoption-friendly school, we aim to:

- commit to looking after our staff who work closely with our adopted children;
- develop peer support for staff;
- offer external supervision and counselling to staff;
- encourage staff to look after themselves.

12. Using our resources wisely

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+): All school-age children who have left care under an adoption, special guardianship, or child arrangements order are eligible for the Pupil Premium Plus. This means that the school receives an annual payment for each eligible child in Reception to Year 11. The Department for Education describes this as ‘additional funding given to schools to improve the educational and personal outcomes for pupils who have been adopted from care, including (but not limited to) their attainment’.

If you are happy for us to claim the Pupil Premium Plus, you should inform the School Office about your child’s adoptive or special guardianship status and provide supporting evidence. We include this information in our annual school census returns in October and January.

The Department for Education specifies that: ‘The funding is not ring-fenced and is not for individual children – so the Department would not necessarily expect the school to spend PP+ on every child adopted from care on roll at the school. This is partially because a child may have left the school and new pupils may have joined but also because a school is best placed to determine how the additional funding can be deployed to have the maximum impact. For example, a school may decide to train their staff in recognising and responding to attachment-related issues; or that a particular adopted child needs tailored support that is in excess of the PP+ the school has received. Alternatively, they may decide that a whole-class intervention is appropriate and that other pupils who attract the Pupil Premium will benefit from this, alongside other pupils who are not deemed to be disadvantaged (see PAC-UK 2013).

As a school we adhere to the Department for Education’s suggestion that schools discuss the measures they are putting in place with parents, and we welcome conversations with parents regarding their children’s needs. Parents are invited to contact Mrs Learmouth regarding these discussions. We are transparent about how we spend our Pupil Premium Plus funding and parents can view our annual Pupil Premium Plus report on our website.