

Spotlight on Adoption Support Practice in Brighton and Hove Schools

Throughout Brighton and Hove schools, there are examples of positive practice and use of the Pupil Premium to support children who have been adopted from care and their families. The following examples have been selected to illustrate the types of support in place. There are other schools who are likely to be providing positive support too. Please do contact the Virtual School to tell us about any positive practice in adoption support that you know about, so that we can develop a comprehensive profile of adoption support practice in our local schools.

Dorothy Stringer Secondary School provides a range of adoption support in consultation with parents and focussing on individual student/pupil needs.

These include:

- counselling/therapy in and out of school
- financial support for school trips
- learning/study aids eg ipads/laptops
- key attachment figures in addition to form tutors
- music lessons and learning an instrument.
- extra lessons in Core subjects.

Additionally, Stringer facilitates an Adopter Network group where parents can discuss common issues and key adoption 'hot spots'. The group is in the early stages of developing a resource for the school that identifies key challenges/opportunities, for children who have been adopted from care, in their secondary school learning journey.

Downs Infant School expanded their Inclusion Team to give them the capacity to offer a 'Key Adult' role to support children who attract Pupil Premium Plus Grant.

The SENCO carries out termly reviews with class teachers and, together with the Headteacher, a tailor made support package is developed for all children adopted from care and/or under Special Guardianship Order. Each package is designed to be holistic and comprehensive, addressing a range of needs, including learning targets and any IEP targets.

For example, the Key Adult might:

- support a child in the classroom to access the curriculum
- run nurture groups
- engage a child in the Social Use of Language programme
- 'bridge' a child into school/class every morning
- work on playground social skills with a child.

Additionally, the school run the Family SEAL programme, inviting Adopters to take part with other parents.

Downs Junior School have employed a Teacher, with a therapeutic background, to focus on the needs of children who are adopted from care, are on Special Guardianship Orders, or are in long term foster placements. School staff, parents and governors together developed the Job Description and Person Specification (which are available on request via Virtual School).

The Teacher does not have classroom responsibilities and therefore is able to, for example:

- provide whole school training and raise awareness about attachment issues across the school eg attachment awareness is a standing agenda item at staff meetings
- develop support plans, alongside parents and other key staff, to create tailor made support packages, which are flexible and adaptable to changing needs
- offer personalised tuition
- be available to parents routinely at the beginning and end of each day
- provide Forest School activities with children at lunchtime and in an after school club – including, for example, risk taking within safe boundaries, building resilience and self confidence
- develop 'calming' bags for each child and create safe spaces

Additionally, the school uses a Key Adult system. The Key Adult works directly with the child and links with parents, the specialist teacher and all other school staff, to ensure the child's plans are followed through and are meeting their support needs.

Since December 2014 the school have run a half termly group for parents, with a parallel 'film night' (film and popcorn) for their children supported by a Teaching Assistant. The parents group can be described as a 'social with a purpose', providing parents with opportunities to share their experiences and identify common issues for action.

Hove Junior School aim to be an 'attachment aware' school. A plan is developed for each child adopted from care, based on an attachment assessment. Parents, class teachers, Inclusion lead/SENCO, Individual Needs Assistants and other staff linked to the child, are involved in the assessment and planning process and a Team around the Child (TAC) is created. A Key Adult is allocated to each child.

Staff in the TAC may:

- meet and greet the child at stressful times in the school day
- wear a badge with the child's name and acknowledge them by name each time they see the child around the school
- create a safe space for the child
- display pictures of their family
- support the child to access additional support, such as
 - Baking Nurture Group
 - Better Reading Partners
 - Lunchtime fun activity group
 - Lego therapy groups
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As part of their inclusion policy, the school are using a staff meeting to deliver attachment training, focussing on best practice in supporting children with attachment issues and their families.

Additionally, the school have facilitated a forum for parents since November 2014. The group runs as a Breakfast Club, meeting every 6 weeks straight after school drop off. An agenda is sent out in advance and topics already addressed include:

- sensory breaks/processing
- speech and language
- transitions

The Club is open to Parents who are adopters and to Carers with SGO's or Residence Orders. All staff involved in a TAC may also attend.

Saltdean Primary School have an open door policy for parents of children adopted from care. The SENCO offers parents a meeting each term to focus on the needs of their children and how these may best be met. Use of the Pupil Premium Plus grant is discussed and a plan developed using the Individual Education Plan model.

Children may be offered:

- extra tuition outside school
- support to address gross and fine motor needs incl Occupational Therapy assessment
- specific targeted interventions linked to maths and literacy
- social skills groups and circle of friends groups
- lunchtime social club
- calm boxes
- Key Adults

The Key Adult role includes:

- 'meet and greet' and settle in class at the beginning of the school day
- linking with parents – incl use of a home/school book
- touching base during the day – to illustrate they are keeping the child in mind
- meeting with the child during the week for sessions which are often based on the Theraplay model
- sending a post card to the child at home during lengthy holidays

Attachment training for school staff has led to changes in language and practice eg Time In cards rather than Time Out. Additionally, the SENCO has linked with a colleague at Woodingdean Primary School to provide a 90 minute Twilight Session, 'Introduction to Attachment', for Newly Qualified Teachers in their cluster. This includes examples of strategies, tips and tools to use in the classroom to build attachment and address attachment issues.

St Andrews Primary School employ 1.5 Attachment Co-ordinators to work with children who are adopted. Their role includes:

- communicating with parents
- assessing children's needs
- developing intervention strategies to respond to identified needs
- linking with other staff within a whole school approach to support
- creating 'personal statements' for each child identifying their strengths and difficulties
- classroom based support
- 'meet and greet' in the morning and 'handover' at the end of the school day
- 'parts' work with children
- providing extra support on 'difficult days'

For the last two years the school have invited parents who are adopters to attend a 'Cheese and Wine' evening to introduce new parents to the school and to meet other parents of children adopted from care, as well as key school staff.

St Luke's Primary School ground their support for children who have been adopted from care in their general pastoral system. Sociograms are used throughout the school to identify children's sense of belonging and connectedness. Children on the margins are then offered support to develop their friendship skills and experience positive ways of relating with their peers. This includes: guidance on positive behaviours and skills, constructed social experiences to practise skills and open reflection on what works.

Additionally, the school have employed an Attachment Mentor to work specifically with children who are not living with their birth parents. In relation to children who are adopted from care, the role of the Attachment Mentor includes:

- meeting with parents to go through the child's life story - for the school to build on, rather than parents having to tell and retell
- mapping of emotional hot spots for a child in relation to the school day/week/year and the curriculum
- identifying children's challenges and strengths and developing an individual plan of support for each child
- working alongside a team of Learning Mentors to create a team around the child

Children can, for example, be offered:

- a key attachment figure
- work on anxiety incl. learning self-soothing strategies
- a counsellor/therapist
- coaching eg friendship skills, 'parts' work and growth mindset
- support to grow a talent – then generalise to other areas of their life
- calm spaces
- a celebration of their Adoption Day

The school facilitates a group for parents/carers of children not living with their birth parents.