




Supporting your foster child at primary school.


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We know that children in care do less well than their peers when it comes to school attainment, but with the right support you can help to close that gap and allow your foster children to achieve their full potential.


Top tips for successful learners

 **Talking with your child:** Research tells us that early language skills are the key to successful learning in every area. Conversations, stories (both read and told), jokes, songs and rhymes are all ways to enhance children's vocabulary and understanding of language. For children in care it is likely that this has been an area of neglect and will therefore need even greater input. Many children are unwilling to talk about their day at school but it can be encouraged in subtle ways:

- Role model reporting of the day's events; tell children what you have been up to that day and encourage others in the family to share their experiences.
- Engage your foster child in positive talk about school. This doesn't have to be about learning, it could be a comment on something you noticed when you dropped them off, such as a friendly greeting, an interesting display of work or a new feature in the playground.
- Keep reading to them, even once they are expected to read to you, and make reading a treat.
- Use as wide a vocabulary as possible – even very young children can learn some quite complicated words, and they enjoy using them.


 **Communication with school:** Talking with teachers is also a vital part of success in school, especially when the child knows that this is happening!

- Be sure to contact your foster child's class teacher and TA as soon as possible to establish a good working relationship, and find out the best way to communicate with them regularly.
- Attendance – yours, not theirs!
By attending open days, information evenings, parents' evenings, concerts, plays and sporting events, social activities and award ceremonies, you are sending a positive message to your child about school and the importance of education in all our lives. You will be better informed about the way the school runs, the teaching methods used and how to create a supportive learning environment.
- Make sure you know how to use the parent portal so that you receive all school information and dates, even if letters are sent via children; better to receive it twice than not at all.

 **Homework:** Encourage your child to complete their homework without giving too much help. Homework can be a way for teachers to find out how much a child has learned in class, or a chance to practice a new skill. If in doubt about how to help, ask their teacher.

- Creating a quiet and appropriate space to get homework done is important, even if they still insist on doing homework at the kitchen table.
- Show that you know when homework is expected and when it is due back by asking if they have their homework to show you.


- Most schools will expect children in primary school to read every day so if they don't bring home a reading book, use the time to read to them or share reading a home book.
- It is important to let children make mistakes and to point out that this is the best way to learn. Checking and editing work is also an important.
- Use 'captive audience' time (meal times, walking or car journeys, bath and bed time etc) to practice spellings and times tables as often as possible.
- Study together – if you're involved in any kind of learning, talk about what you're doing; share the experience.

 **Organisation:** Start teaching and modelling the skills of organisation early on so that they are well prepared by the time they move to secondary school. Having everything they need for the school day will make them more successful learners.


- Talk about the next day's needs (PE kit, special resources etc) and suggest getting everything ready the night before.
- Use a calendar that the child can also access and encourage them to refer to it so that they learn to look ahead.

 **Celebration:** Acknowledge all your foster child's achievements in an appropriate way;


- display art work, certificates, postcards and other evidence of praise and achievement in prominent places (the fridge or mantelpiece, or perhaps a designated place for each child)
- talk about the positive things in the PEP meetings in a way that the child can manage.
- go to the school's celebration events, even if your child hasn't won anything this time; it creates aspirations

 **Support:** Living in an environment where education is valued and promoted will have a positive impact on a child's attitude to learning. A child who views themselves as a learner will make more rapid progress in school.

- "Every day is a school day!" Share your own learning, whether formal or just something new you learned today.
- Help to create a culture of curiosity where children want to learn more about the world around them; visits to places of interests and a range of non-fiction books or magazines will promote this.

 **Social development:** We know that happy children learn best, and children who have sound friendships are happy children.

- Encourage social links by talking about friendships and social skills.
- Get to know the child's friends and their families so that outside school contact can be developed.

 **When things go wrong:** No child goes through school without some periods of difficulty, and children in care are likely to find school more challenging than most. When children report an issue:

- Listen to their case and take it seriously.
- Be prepared to advocate for the child, reporting their problem to the appropriate person so the child knows you are trying to help.
- Be discreet so that the child doesn't feel that their problems have become public knowledge.
- Support without undermining the child's faith in the school and staff – it will be an important learning opportunity for the child to rebuild any relationship that has been damaged.



For further support and advice, speak
to your child's Virtual School Officer

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