

Self-study notes

Unit No.14: The looked after child's world in the education system

Unit objectives

- Consider ways in which foster and residential carers can help to make school a more positive experience for looked after children.
- Enhance their understanding of the ways in which looked after children are supported within educational establishments.

Outline of Unit

- "Craig's Story" – the exclusion incident
- Support arrangements in education establishments
- The designated manager role

Introduction

This unit is aimed principally at foster carers, residential workers and social workers. The unit contains some of the same content as Unit 15 which is aimed at teachers. The unit is designed to stand alone, but could follow on from Unit 13, The Education System.

The unit is designed to last approximately 1.5 to two hours. There are optional activities and reading which can be undertaken if you have more time available or have particular interest in this topic.

School staff, according to Education Scotland's Improvement Guide on Culture and Ethics (available as a pdf within the unit training materials), are expected to: "take positive and proactive steps to ensure that factors, such as the learning environment, family circumstances, health or disability, or social or emotional factors which may hinder learning are promptly identified and addressed effectively." Staff are also expected to: "review these needs with families and consider if support is good enough." In this context 'families' also means carers. These are general expectations and it is important to develop relationships with schools to be clear how procedures operate locally. There may also be a role in challenging school staff where communication is inadequate or correct procedures are not followed.

The Additional Support for Learning (2009) Act also sets out that children who are looked after are assumed to have an additional support need unless assessed otherwise. In practice that means that schools have a legal obligation to carry out an assessment of a child's needs when they become looked after, which should be reviewed at regular intervals, to evidence whether a child requires additional support and thus additional resource, or not. The Children and Young People's (Scotland) (2014) Act also requires local authorities to have a child's

plan in place for children who have additional support needs. This plan should be an assessment of need and an action plan which sets out how a local authority will meet a child's individual needs. Information to form this assessment should be gathered and analysed using GIRFEC tools: the my world triangle, the resilience matrix and the National Risk Framework.

Activity

View the classroom scene from the film, "Craig's Story" which ends with Craig rushing from the room, brushing past teacher Mr Scammell and knocking his papers to the floor. As a result of the incident Craig is excluded from school. If you have not previously seen the entire film, you should view it now and then replay the classroom scene. As you view the scene, consider:

- How might Craig / Mr Scammell be feeling?
- What might have caused them to react as they did?
- How could the incident have been avoided?

If you have time, you might like to view the subsequent scenes from "Craig's Story", at Newcross, and also the meeting at school. What are your views about Michael's role? What are your responsibilities specifically in trying to anticipate and avoid difficulties? The following points occurred to us:

- The need for an unavoidable exclusion to be managed strictly according to the local authority's guidelines (often available on the web), and the carer's role in being co-operative but firm with the school to ensure that correct procedures are followed.
- The carer's role in advocacy: specifically in relation to their child; more generally in relation to looked after children attending school (e.g. in contributing to teachers' in-service days).

There is another resource included as part of the training materials (the At School in Care section of the "Learning with Care" film which raises several issues about being in school from the perspective of a looked after young person.)

Support in school

The purpose of this part of the unit is to introduce you to the different ways in which schools provide support for pupils, as well as the formal arrangements for supporting looked after children.

Activity

We invite you to visit the Journey to Excellence website www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk. The site includes a wealth of resources which will help you understand different aspects of school life. For this activity we would like you to navigate to the Culture and Ethos section of the website.

The films are all quite short, typically 3-5 minutes. Which film(s) you choose will depend on your interests. For example, you might choose to view "A Nurturing Ethos" (5 minutes) which outlines how a primary school has developed a nurture class. The film, "Mearns Academy Supporting Vulnerable Learners" (3 minutes), outlines a secondary school's support for looked after children.

After you view the film(s) spend a little time reflecting on your own experiences of engagement with schools, as a parent and/or as a carer.

Now download the hand-out, Supporting Children and Young People, (taken from the Education Scotland Improvement Guide series). As you read about the five areas represented you might like to think about practical ways in which schools could meet the standards expected. For example, the guide says that an example of excellent practice would be where: "children and young people have confidence to ask for help when they need it and know that adults will use their power to help them in the best way possible." If a child was being bullied they should expect that telling a teacher or their carer would result in the adults communicating effectively and agreeing suitable action.

The Designated Manager role

The document, Core Tasks for Designated Managers, is available as part of the training materials. It is divided into sections for different sectors. All schools are expected to have a named member of the management team who fulfils the role of Designated Manager (DM). In pre-school establishments and primary schools this will usually be the head or depute head. In secondary schools the role may be performed by a member of the senior management team, or by a member of the pastoral care team or support for learning team. Core tasks are indicated in the document in respect of communication, meeting the needs of children and young people, advocacy and learning.

Activity

The four statements below are taken from the document. For each one, note down some ideas about the actions you think might be expected of a DM in relation to the task and also how you could help by liaising with the DM.

- The DM must know which pupils in their establishment are looked after and maintain confidential files in relation to each of them and to share relevant information on a need to know basis.
- The DM, where appropriate, should consult and liaise with families and carers. In addition, the DSM should act as the liaison person within the school for social work, education and local health services and other relevant agencies.
- The DM must ensure that all adults sharing parental responsibility, including birth parents, for a child or young person receive copies of

reports, invitations to school functions, and other documents, policies and prospectuses usually given to parents.

- The DM should support the efforts of parents / carers and others to provide an educationally rich home environment for all looked after children and young people within their establishment. The DM should consider parental involvement strategies within the school to ensure that the “corporate parent” is involved in, for example, the Parent Council.

Download the full document now and read it, or read the section most relevant to the age of your child / young person.

The DM role fits within the general arrangements for supporting all pupils. These are set out in the document, *Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential* – a standard of support for young people in Scottish schools. You can find information about the 10 Standards of Personal Support in Schools in an appendix to the Core Tasks for Designated Managers.

- Opportunities for developing knowledge, skills and attitudes
- Access to information to make decisions and informed choices
- Opportunities for citizenship and involvement through participation
- Regular review of progress
- Help with transitions
- Help to plan for the future
- Access to staff by children and parents / carers
- Co-ordinates support between agencies and schools
- Respects confidentiality
- Ensures time and space to seek help

Key messages

- The importance of children having good relationships with teachers as the basis of successful learning.
- The need for an unavoidable exclusion to be managed strictly according to the local authority’s guidelines (often available on the web), and the carer’s role in being co-operative but firm with the school to ensure that correct procedures are followed.
- The importance of the designated manager role and the value of carers developing good relationships with the DM.
- The need for teachers to examine their assumptions about pupils’ home situations and to be careful about inadvertently causing upset when designing lessons.

- The carer's role in advocacy: specifically in relation to their child; more generally in relation to looked after children attending school (e.g. in contributing to teachers' in-service days).