

LEARNING WITH CARE



Care to Learn?

The educational experiences of children and young people who are looked after



SPEAKING OUT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE



Save the Children

1. Getting Through the School Gates

Many of the young people who were consulted had experienced gaps in their education for a variety of reasons or had dropped out of school early. For some this occurred due to exclusion, but there were other reasons for non-attendance.

| Key factors leading to non-attendance | Strategies which young people find helpful: |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakdown of care arrangements leading to a change of school. • Complex or difficult transport arrangements to maintain a school place. • Poor support experienced in the care environment which affects their routine attendance. • Negative peer pressure. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Flexible and creative arrangements to enable young people to stay in a successful school placement. ✓ Transport provision which enables young people to maintain a school placement where possible. ✓ Flexible support to enable young people to take time out of school when personal issues become prohibitive to learning, and to reintegrate into education as soon as they are able. ✓ Mechanisms to help looked after young people experience positive role models or positive peer pressure e.g. mentoring schemes, budget for sports, arts, clubs or other activities in the school or community. |

2. Settling in At School

We found that even when the young people were attending school, many had experienced bullying, discrimination, difficult relationships and distress at school, in some cases leading to behaviour difficulties, suspensions and risk of exclusion.

| Key factors which prevent young people from settling in at school: | Strategies which young people find helpful: |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For some this appeared to be linked to social and emotional resilience of the young person and their ability to cope with school. • They identified certain triggers which make them feel stressed at school such as negative stereotypes about being 'in care'. • Some had difficulties in managing anger and violent reactions to 'triggers'. • Others described difficulties or anxieties within the care environment which clearly impacted on their feelings about school. • There were not always opportunities for the young people to establish supportive relationships which help young people cope at school. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Training and support for teachers in managing challenging behaviour. ✓ Training and support for teachers on diversity and discrimination. ✓ Confidentiality policy/ protocols in schools and care settings clearly communicated to the young people. ✓ PSE (personal and social education) insert on diversity and discrimination including insights into the care system. ✓ Professional counselling and support for young people experiencing bullying, isolation, difficulties in managing aggressive or destructive behaviour, depression or severe anxiety. ✓ Flexibility in support relationships within school setting. ✓ Prior consultation with young people on professionals to be involved in care reviews and hearings. |

3. Ready to Learn

For those young people who had managed to attend regularly and settle into school, educational outcomes were still below average levels of attainment. Young people identified various factors which affected their progress at school.

Key factors which hinder young people's learning at school:

- Some described negative or inconsistent learning experiences in early childhood which had affected their feelings about school.
- The learning environment at school did not suit all young people's learning styles.
- Residential care homes were described by many as being too distracting to allow serious efforts to study.
- Many described feelings of low confidence or low self esteem in relation to learning.
- Some young people felt that what they learn at school does not feel relevant to their life.

Strategies which young people find helpful:

- ✓ Early diagnosis of learning difficulties and additional support when learning has been severely interrupted or inadequate.
- ✓ Adaptation of classroom techniques to correspond to young people's diverse learning styles and behaviour needs.
- ✓ Opportunities to take part in outdoor education, sport or arts activities.
- ✓ A quiet time and space for learning in residential homes with the active support of carers.
- ✓ Negotiated ground rules and incentive systems in residential homes linked to exam revision and homework.
- ✓ Care staff actively supporting each young person's school programme, including extra curricular activities and events such as sports days or school shows.
- ✓ Budgets for extra tuition where necessary.

4. Fulfilling Potential

Even when young people had managed to progress through school very few then progressed beyond compulsory education into further or higher education.

Key factors preventing young people from fulfilling their potential:

- A number of the young people left education early due to a crisis or negative school experiences. Some felt that they were not wanted at school anymore, some felt no motivation to continue and there seemed to be little support in making big decisions which would have a very serious impact on their future life chances.
- For those who did progress to further education they experienced a lack of emotional and financial support and were often not able to cope with education whilst leaving care.

Strategies which young people find helpful:

- A strong focus on education at reviews including, through care and after care planning. Planning should consider the following on-going support needs for the young person's educational progress:
- ✓ Practical support needs e.g. access to information about courses, help with applications and interviews.
 - ✓ Financial support needs e.g. access to grants, bursaries and benefits.
 - ✓ Emotional support needs e.g. someone to encourage the young person to apply in the first place, someone to believe in them and who then has an on-going interest in their progress, providing encouragement, advice and respite when they feel vulnerable or discouraged.

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