



# The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

## **Education Matters in Care**

A report by the independent cross-party  
inquiry into the educational attainment of  
looked after children in England

### **Acknowledgements**

Special thanks go to Lisa Johnson, Sarah Hurrell (to whom we are indebted for her dedicated work on post-16 education), and Helen Newton for dutifully nursing this inquiry from conception to production.

A full list of contributors to the inquiry are listed in the Appendices but the inquiry would especially like to acknowledge the support and information provided by the Fostering Network, Hackney Children's Services, the Virtual School Heads who contributed and the Care Leaver's Association.

Most of all we want to thank the many young people in care and care leavers for their honest, insightful and positive contributions to this inquiry. They are the real experts and without them this report would lack the knowledge and experience vital to make it meaningful.

***Produced in conjunction with UCU  
(University and College Union)***



# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> <i>by Edward Timpson MP</i>	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About this inquiry</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Key recommendations</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
Education: a tool for life	<b>10</b>
<b>Where we stand</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>What works</b>	<b>15</b>
Placement stability	15
Strong leadership	15
Timely, sustained and targeted interventions	16
Tracking progress	16
Support for and from carers	16
Spreading ‘best practice’	16
Building on recent policy initiatives	17
<b>What’s wrong and needs improving</b>	<b>19</b>
Ensuring stability	20
Providing leadership	21
Sustained support	26
Admissions and exclusion	30
Academies and free schools	33
Alternative educational settings	33
Out of area placements	35
Educational support at home	35
Financial support	38
Personalised support	40
Coordinating education with social care	41
Tackling emotional and mental health	42
Giving children a voice	44
Focusing training	45
Inspect the right things	46
Adoption	47
<b>Post-16 education of looked after children and care leavers in England</b>	<b>49</b>
Where we stand on post-16 education	49
Advocacy and support post-16	50

Transitions in post-16 education	55
Outreach, mentoring and raising aspiration	58
Education providers and their role for looked after young people	59
Financial support	60
Quality assurance and monitoring progress	62
Work experience and vocational opportunities	63
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>65</b>
Information, guidance and communication	65
Financial support	65
Accountability, oversight and transparency	66
Planning and pathways	68
Carers, professionals and schooling	69
Mentoring and aspiration	70
Encouraging and facilitating learning	71
Health and well being	71
Managing transitions	72
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>77</b>
Appendix 1: Terms of reference—inquiry into the educational outcomes of young people in care/from a care background	77
Appendix 2: List of respondents	78

# Foreword

I'm lucky. I come from a stable family home. I had the value of education drummed into me from an early age. The first foster children that came to live with us when I was seven years old were not so lucky. Despite being aged six and five, their speech was extremely poor and their lack of even basic education was alarming. I remember going on a family holiday to North Wales with them and when they saw the sea for the first time they shouted 'Big puddle!', such was their stymied and stunted early life experience. They knew more swear words than adjectives. We were starting from a very low base. Yet in the months that followed a remarkable thing happened. They settled, they thrived on a routine and they started to engage in learning both at school (and nursery) and at home. In short they began to benefit from an education in a secure setting.

That was the late 1970s. Over thirty years on, despite the efforts of carers, schools and social services as well as a stronger focus by Government on improving the educational attainment of looked after children, they remain disproportionately destined to a life of academic underachievement. Their pre-care experience will mean they are always playing catch up with their peers. But by putting education at the heart of their time in care and by ensuring all those helping them don't dilute their ambitions and aspirations, we know that the life chances for children in care can improve markedly.

This report is an important recognition of that potential power of education to transform the lives of looked after children. It doesn't seek to reinvent the wheel, but proposes a series of predominantly practical measures that aim to cement the educational attainment of children in care in the psyche of all those who have a stake—professional, corporate and personal—and to give it the highest possible priority both at school and at home.

The many years I spent living with foster children opened my eyes to not only the desperate disadvantages they carry with them into care, but also the potential for turning their lives around whilst in care. Education is key to achieving that goal and to providing looked after children with the childhood they deserve. I hope this report presents opportunities to help make that happen.

**Edward Timpson MP**

*Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers*

July 2012

## Executive summary

Throughout this inquiry there has been an acceptance that education matters but that achieving in education is much more difficult for young people in care than for their peers.

By the very nature of being in care, young people have experienced a different and often very difficult start in life. Those experiences in themselves create barriers and so need to be understood in the context of learning and education.

Some of the major obstacles identified during this inquiry relate to: the stability and continuity of the services and people responsible for the health, well being and education of looked after young people; the management of transitions in care and education; and the level of understanding about the importance of education for children in care by professionals and carers.

A number of the recommendations we make in this report seek to promote a more cohesive system where education is an intrinsic part of the care environment and where all key people in a looked after young person's life understand and actively participate in their education.

While there are no shortage of statistics that highlight the attainment gap of those in care compared to their peers, this inquiry has spoken to young people who have done well in education. Despite tough backgrounds, young people in care can achieve when properly supported and encouraged. The inquiry found that much more needs to be done to increase aspiration not only of the young people themselves, but those around them.

## About this inquiry

This inquiry was established to independently examine the education system as experienced by looked after young people and to make recommendations that could lead to better educational outcomes for children in care.

In 2011 there were over 65,000 young people in care in England. Studies show that young people in care do not have different aspirations than those from other families—they want a good home, a job and to be financially secure—yet young people in care are much more likely to underachieve (compared to the national average) at school. Recent measurements introduced by the Department for Education reaffirm that there is a significant ‘attainment gap’.

Education is a key factor in decreasing poverty, increasing life chances and creating healthier, wealthier, more active members of society. This inquiry aimed to focus specifically on barriers to learning and educational attainment for young people from a care background and to not only provide recommendations but to show where there are successes and highlight best practice.

We specifically wanted to look at:

- Why do young people in care achieve at lower levels than their peers?
- What factors have the greatest impact on the educational attainment of children in care?
- How does the ‘on the ground’ experience of current policy correlate to the intentions of current/previous policy?
- Why is there such regional disparity in rates of care leavers who enter education, employment or training at the age of 19?
- What examples of best practice should be highlighted either here or abroad?
- Are there ‘common sense’, practical measures that could easily be changed to improve the current system and its outcomes?
- Is the correct level and type of support available in schools for young people in care?
- What extra support can be put in place to encourage/enable attainment for looked after children?
- What action needs to be taken to ensure more young people from care go on to acquire higher level education and skills?

## Key recommendations\*

\*A full list of the inquiry's recommendations can be found on page 65

Recommendation directed towards\*

- 1. Put Virtual School Heads on a statutory footing**

The role of Virtual School Heads ('VSHs') should be extended and strengthened by making the position statutory. This will allow the VSH to have real weight within local authorities, hold schools to account and ensure the continuity and quality of learning and support beyond 16. Virtual School Heads should retain responsibility for care leavers from the age of 0-25.

DfE
- 2. Introduce a Pupil Premium Plus**

We recommend that a Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) be introduced for looked after children sufficient to ensure that all necessary support in pursuit of educational excellence is available. This will help plug the gap of funding uncertainty and inconsistency that currently exists, as well as demonstrate a practical acknowledgement of the deeper rooted problems children in care have when accessing education. DfE should also explore the merits of the Pupil Premium kicking in for looked after children from before the age of four.

DfE
- 3. Virtual School Heads should control the Pupil Premium**

The Pupil Premium (and PP+ as recommended above), should be allocated to the VSH to ensure the money is spent smartly and in a coordinated way with carers being consulted and closely involved.

DfE
- 4. Change the timing and length of Personal Education Plans**

Personal Education Plans ('PEPs') should be reviewed termly rather than biannually and should not be restricted to the period of compulsory education but should transcend a child's time in care. The 0-25 model adopted by Hackney should be the norm.

LAs
- 5. More educational training for carers**

There should be a strengthening of the component on supporting education in recruit-ment training for foster carers and staff in children's homes. Training for foster carers and children's home staff should include how to make education the high priority it needs to be. More educational opportunities should be made available to foster carers, including the potential for them to study a foundation degree.

LAs

\*LAs Local authorities; DfE Department for Education; BiS Department for Business Innovation and Skills; DoH Department of Health; FE colleges Further education colleges; HEIs Higher education institutions; IFAs Independent Fostering agencies



- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <p><b>6. Education and social worker training and career development</b></p> <p>Greater weight should be placed on education in initial social worker training and CPD for social workers should include dated training on the educational development of young people from a care background and periodic review of the education system and options available to young people (as those options change). Conversely teachers should receive greater training to improve their understanding of and ability to manage issues such as trauma, attachment and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.</p>  | <p><i>Training providers/LAs</i></p> |
| <p><b>7. Mandatory mental health assessment and access to mental health services</b></p> <p>We recommend mandatory mental health assessment on children entering care and prioritised access to CAMHS. Initial assessments of looked after children should be improved to better identify their mental health needs and, with input from educational psychologists, establish the impact those needs may be having on each child's education. We agree with and repeat the recommendation of the Children Schools and Families Select Committee in their report of Session 2008-9 entitled 'Looked-after Children' in that children in care should have guaranteed and prioritised access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.</p> | <p><i>DoH</i></p>                    |
| <p><b>8. Designated members of staff in FE and HE</b></p> <p>Build upon the Designated Teacher model in schools by promoting a Designated Member of Staff in further and higher education as best practice.</p>   | <p><i>FE colleges/<br/>HEIs</i></p>  |
| <p><b>9. Roll out the Frank Buttle Quality Mark</b></p> <p>Assist and encourage rolling out of the Frank Buttle Quality Mark to all registered providers of further and higher education.</p>   | <p><i>DfE/BiS</i></p>                |
| <p><b>10. Ofsted classification of looked after children</b></p> <p>Ofsted should keep looked after children as a distinct group for inspection purposes rather than as part of the 'all vulnerable people' group so that their progress and the impact of specific interventions, support and initiatives on their outcomes (educational and otherwise) can be better tracked. As part of their evaluation schedule, Ofsted should inspect the Pupil Premium (including the PP+), how it is spent, and the impact it is having on educational outcomes.</p>  | <p><i>Ofsted</i></p>                 |

# Introduction

## Inspire, encourage, equip

Whatever your background, education matters. For children in and leaving care it really matters. They know it too. When asked what is most important to them, after stability of their placement comes education. *(Ofsted submission)*

Yet despite genuine efforts by successive governments to raise the education bar for looked after children, with some albeit modest and slow moving success (for example many point to the fact that their GCSE figures have improved by only five percent in the last five years and the achievement gap between children in care and their peers on the crucial five good GCSEs target has widened), there remains concern that the extent of children in care's educational disadvantage is still all too prevalent.

And with the care population in England rising from just under 60,000 in 2007 to over 65,500 in 2011, the demand for tackling the educational attainment gap is not diminishing.

There is of course a danger of making lazy generalisations that looked after children don't do well in school. Indeed as part of our inquiry we met young people with experience of care who went on to be academically very high achieving. They however remain the exception.

The majority of children enter care having suffered abuse and neglect and for them engaging in education can often be almost impossible whilst they continue to have underlying and all too often untreated trauma that can directly affect their mental health. As one contributor to our inquiry said 'you are building them up from a very low level.' *(Jo Walden, Chair of National Director's Group)*

It is therefore perhaps not surprising that over a quarter of children in care have a formal statement of special educational needs compared with only three percent of all pupils. The fact that most looked after children come from homes with little or no educational achievement or aspiration certainly doesn't help.

We should also remember that half of all looked after children and young people who take GCSEs entered care after their thirteenth birthday and around 90% leave care before taking any formal exams.

For those who remain there is a scarcity of reliable and meaningful data about later life outcomes for children from care beyond their nineteenth birthday, making it difficult to assess the long term effects of their educational experience. *(Barnardo's submission)*

Professor David Berridge of Bristol University also makes the fair point that educational achievement is just one indicator, albeit an important one, for determining the success or otherwise of the care system and we should be careful not to use it as the sole barometer of outcomes for children in care. *(David Berridge submission)*

Nevertheless, even taking these mitigating circumstances into account, it doesn't fully explain away the huge gulf that still exists and why some children from care manage to buck the trend. We know for instance that some care settings in other European countries send ten times as many young people to university as the UK average. *(LGiU submission)*

## **Education: a tool for life**

It remains the case that a lack of educational achievement is one of the biggest barriers to looked after children realising their potential, and is therefore not an issue we can simply ignore. As Eileen Munro told the inquiry, 'the evidence of education improving life chances is devastating.'

The purpose of this cross-party inquiry was to bring together politicians, professionals, parents and, above all, people involved with or touched by the care system, not least the children themselves, to learn from each other's experience and to establish what in the current system works and what doesn't.

Although children in care only make up about 1% of total school population, they bring with them the sternest test of our education and social care systems.

Evidence to our inquiry confirmed that being in care is often a positive experience and that there is much excellent work being done in both education and care to drive the educational progress of children in care, but it continues to be patchy and inconsistent.

Where we discovered best practice we have included it in this report so that others can learn and not feel inhibited to follow suit.

We recognise that this is a complex issue with no quick fix. Similarly we didn't want to set about reinventing the wheel. We didn't want to weigh down practitioners and those working with looked after children with even more reams of legislation, regulation and guidance when there is more than enough already, although in limited cases there was cause for us to consider it where it may help raise the status of education in the care system.

Above all we wanted to build on existing initiatives and reforms that evidently work. We wanted to come up with some practical measures that will ultimately help towards achieving our shared aim of raising the educational attainment of looked after children that gives them the confidence and opportunity to achieve their potential more widely.

In producing this report and setting out our recommendations, we were very mindful of the fact that, on its own, it is unlikely to bring about the culture change in the care system we need. Indeed that was not its purpose or remit.

Recent reports from the Social Work Taskforce, the Children Schools and Families Select Committee 2008-9, Lord Laming, Graham Allen MP, Demos ('In Loco Parentis'), the National Care Advisory Service/Catch 22 ('Access All Areas') and Eileen Munro amongst others are all important pieces of the jigsaw that together have the capability of doing just that, and their successful implementation in whole or part is essential in delivering the change required.

We fully endorse their work and deem the impact of this report in large part contingent on their recommendations also being successfully delivered.

The fact is to improve educational outcomes you have to also tackle the principle causes holding each child back, including instability, poor mental health and a lack of wider support. For that to happen requires unparalleled levels of relentless and dogged perseverance and focus from all those working with looked after children.

Throughout this inquiry we have had the opportunity to meet many people, young and not so young, working and living in the care system, and been able to discuss with them the challenges there are in raising educational attainment for children in care.

Having done so, we are confident that there are plenty of 'superstars' out there who are absolutely committed to meeting that challenge and making significant inroads into the educational achievement gap.

Evidence to our inquiry strongly suggests that by achieving at school and, especially, continuing into further and higher education, young people from care can escape many of the problems experienced by their birth parents and enjoy a better quality of adult life.

*(Sonia Jackson)*

If we can ensure that *all* those who are there to help looked after children 'get it' too, then there is optimism for believing we can bring about real and enduring progress in the educational attainment of children in care.



## Where we stand

'The Government is committed to doing all it can to narrow the gap in the educational attainment of children in care compared to all children.' (*Looked After Children: Further Government Response to the Third Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2008-9 para 69*)

It would be wrong to suggest that the education of children in care has not been on the radar of politicians and practitioners in recent years.

Following the report by the Economic and Social Research Council in 1987 that highlighted the importance of education for children's well-being and future opportunities, there have been numerous efforts made, mainly through legislation and guidance, to boost educational outcomes for looked after children.

Indeed we can point to a plethora of legislation designed to narrow the attainment gap, including:

- **The Children Act 1989** This remains the basis for provision of out-of-home care in England
- **The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000** This implemented the asserted right of looked after children to further and higher education.
- **The Children Act 2004** For the first time, this laid a duty on local authorities to promote the educational attainment of children they looked after and, most importantly, joined up education and care in the Department's of Children's Services with Directors responsible for schools as well as children's social care.
- **2004 Every Child Matters Strategy**
- **Education Act 2002**
- **Education Act 2005**
- **School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (as amended by the Education Act 2005)**
- **Education and Inspections Act 2006**
- **The Education (Admission of Looked After Children) (England) Regulations 2006**
- **The School Admissions Code**
- **Children and Young Persons Act 2008**
- **Regulation 2 of the Children Act 1989 (Higher Education Bursary) (England) Regulations 2009**
- **Improving the Educational attainment of Children in Care (Looked After Children) 2009**
- **Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010**
- **Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children Statutory Guidance 2010 (first published in 2005)**
- **The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers 2011**

All local authorities have a statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of all of our children in care. This hasn't changed. The duty remains clearly set out in primary legislation and central to helping narrow the gap between vulnerable individuals and society as a whole. However, it is also true to say that how local authorities set about fulfilling their statutory duty varies from place to place.

Recent reforms and policy initiatives have in general had a beneficial impact but the distribution of that impact has been far from equal. ***(Barnardo's submission)***

There remains a real lack of high quality research on the education of looked after children, although in recent years there has been a more steady stream of small-scale qualitative studies.

The general consensus of that research is that the educational attainment of children in care falls far below that of the general population, attributable to factors including: instability of care and school placements, inadequate levels of targeted support, low expectations and aspirations, relatively lower starting levels, poorly informed teachers and social workers, and carers not being sufficiently engaged in the child's education.

Efforts to bridge the divide between education and social care have helped, but there continues to be much work to do.

## What works

A survey carried out by Ofsted in 2008 into good practice for looked after children and their education identified the following key elements:

- A focus on looked after children within a framework of high expectations and good teaching and learning for all pupils, including identifying those who may be gifted and talented;
- Looked after children engaged in and taking responsibility for their learning;
- Close monitoring of academic, social and personal progress;
- The involvement of looked after children in learning outside the classroom and after-school activities;
- Unified low profile support in school for each looked after child so that they are not made to feel different;
- The successful engagement of carers and parents.

To help deliver this level and range of good practice requires:

### **Placement stability**

More often than not, the educational journeys of children in care are dominated by interruptions, diversions and false starts. Where that is not the case and placement stability is achieved, the prospects of academic achievement rise markedly.

A stable family home is closely linked to a stable school setting. From placement stability often flows emotional and financial stability, key pillars in creating and sustaining an environment where learning can thrive. It also allows for long term planning rather than a revolving door of crisis management that leaves education way down the list of priorities.

Bearing in mind the importance of not only placement stability, but also the close involvement of children in decision-making in respect of their placement, it is worrying that in the Children's Care Monitor survey of 2011, nearly a quarter of children in care said they were given no notice of a change in their placement until the day of their move, and just over half (55%) said they were only given a week or less notice before they were last moved to live in a different placement.

### **Strong leadership**

Local authorities that provide outstanding services for children in care sustain high aspirations for all. Where practice is most effective, the commitment shown by senior officers and elected members is also clearly demonstrated. (*Ofsted*)

'Authorities where things work best are where people have the authority to make decisions without jumping through hoops, filling in lots of paperwork and having to go through several people to get, for example, small amounts of funding signed off.' (*Sue Kent, BASW*)

There is also overwhelming evidence that strong and consistent leadership leads to better long-term strategic planning for outcomes.



### **Timely, sustained and targeted interventions**

A research report into the educational attainment of looked after children published by the Scottish Government in 2008 (The Educational Attainment of Looked After Children - Local Authority Pilot Projects: Final Research Report) considered the main types of intervention used, namely:

- provision of extra support (extra and individual tutoring in school or home);
- personal education planning;
- support at transition points in education;
- developing staff and parent capacity through training; and
- using information technology and computer-based approaches.

Their analysis concluded that sustained and targeted interventions such as these can be demonstrated to have a positive impact on the educational attainment, school attendance, self esteem and confidence of young people in care, even in a relatively short period of time.

### **Tracking of progress**

For children in care, GCSEs and other exam and test results are a fairly blunt instrument for tracking their progress at school.

To get a strong grip on both educational development and the impact of interventions and support and to ensure consistent and effective evaluation of improvement or otherwise, an almost constant conversation between designated and other teaching staff, carers, learning mentors, health professionals and all those with corporate parenting responsibilities amongst others is necessary.

They should all be acting as pushy parents desperate to know the latest news on progress. Only then will a true picture emerge and the right decisions be made in a timely manner.

### **Support for and from carers**

Carers who come from a solid educational background themselves and who recognise why they must make the educational progress of children in their care a real priority can play a central role in raising both the educational aspirations and achievements of looked after children.

The research also found that parents and carers derived immense support indirectly from interventions designed to improve the achievement of their children. This is crucial in ensuring both the sustainability of the intervention as well as instilling the 'pushy parent' in carers' approach to education.

Schools that work closely with foster carers and involve them in all aspects of school life are far more likely to see a continuance of progress outside of the classroom.

### **Spreading 'Best Practice'**

The inquiry uncovered numerous and welcome examples of best practice. This was coupled

with the increasing frustration that much of the delivery of this excellent and proven work was confined to a single local authority, agency or charity.

Examples of schemes, programmes and organisations we came across that focused on improving education for looked after children:

**The Letterbox Club** Managed by Booktrust, it focuses on improving the educational outlook for looked after children aged 7 - 11 (and recently extended to 13). The basic process of the project is to send looked after children a parcel every month for six months. Each parcel contains a book, maths game or activity, some stationery materials and a personal letter to the child. The idea is that the contents provide interest and activity for the child with a specific focus on reading and maths and with the opportunity for the carer to take part and get involved including reading together. In Suffolk, where the project has been running for six years, as elsewhere, there is clear evidence of significant progress in children's reading ability as well as tangible improvements in maths.

Other notable schemes in this area:

- Our Right to Read which 'provides grants for tutoring for children and adults with reading and spelling difficulties.' <http://www.ourrighttoread.com>
- Voluntary Reading Help, a national charity which helps children who 'struggle with reading to develop a love of reading and learning'. <http://www.vrh.org.uk>
- London Borough of Barnet run an initiative where volunteers hear children in care read in school.
- Kids Company run The Urban Academy which is a 'post-16 educational and life skills academy, specifically designed to meet the needs of young people who reject or have been rejected from other educational facilities due to their complex emotional or behavioural needs.' <http://www.kidsco.org.uk/our-work/the-urban-academy>
- BAAF's Fostering Education Project was funded by a number of businesses and Trusts. It 'developed a training programme for foster carers focusing on supporting primary school-age children in care to improve their confidence and self esteem through reading skills'.
- Dudley MBC - The Virtual School Head has devised a scheme whereby they have a dedicated teacher for children in care that ensures real focus on each individual child's needs and a continuity in school. At a cost of £1,000 per child (funded through a charitable trust) it has seen the number of looked after children remain in higher and further education rise from 7% to 40% in three years.

### **Building on recent policy initiatives**

'There is growing evidence that new initiatives such as virtual school heads, personal education plans (PEPs) and designated teachers are having a positive effect on the experiences of looked after children and young people.' (C4EO research review November 2009)

These are all explored in greater detail further on in the report.

## What's wrong and needs improving?

### **Raising status, overcoming stigma**

Every child has potential. For children in care, more often than not that potential remains bottled up and unfulfilled. A lack of educational attainment and achievement is one of the biggest barriers to realising that potential, not helped by the all too often low status looked after children have within the education system.

A report in 2003 by the Social Exclusion Unit into the education of children in care identified five key reasons why children in care underachieve in education:

- (i) Too many young people's lives are characterised by **instability**;
- (ii) Young people in care spend too much **time out of school** or other place of learning;
- (iii) Children do not have sufficient help with their education if they get behind;
- (iv) Carers are not expected, or equipped, to provide sufficient **support and encouragement** at home for learning and development; and
- (v) Children in care need more help with their **emotional, mental or physical health and wellbeing**.

An Ofsted study in 2007 into what looked after children thought about their education and subsequent surveys identified:

- Lack of ambition and aspiration for looked after children's education;
- Inadequacy of support, especially targeted support;
- Failure to make corporate parenting a priority;
- Quality of teaching and lessons;
- Implementation of current and previous policy is too variable.

Low levels of expectation about what looked after children can achieve academically persist. We were told of one incident where a child in care had been 'deflated' when he was told by his teacher that he 'only' needed five GCSEs at Grade E to attend the sixth form college, thus setting his bar on achievement at the floor rather than the ceiling.

In her research project YIPPEE: Young People in Public Care, Pathways and Education in Europe, Professor Sonia Jackson found that in all the countries that participated in the project (England, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Hungary), young people in care did much less well educationally than others.

Looked after children represent only a very small proportion of pupils in schools, meaning that the individual and specialist care and support they often need is far too often washed up with the mainstream pastoral support on offer.

There is a general problem with the education system in that by the time cared-for children reach 16 years of age they often do not attain the GCSEs they require to go on to further and higher education and the system's rigidity doesn't allow them to do so later. The increasing of the age of compulsory education to 18 may start to address this issue. It is also the case that improvements in educational provision do not appear to have benefited looked after children with more complex learning and behavioural needs. (*Barnardo's submission*)

A strong theme throughout the inquiry was the continuing and wide variation between local authorities in the level of commitment and resource devoted to improving educational outcomes for children in care.

The success of those with high levels of commitment, backed by timely interventions and support, indicate the scope for effective action in areas with less focus and determination to make progress. There are still too many examples of weak corporate parenting leading to unambitious visions for children in care.

There remains too much inconsistency in the quality of planning and assessment. **(Ofsted submission)**

There was also concern raised that the attitude of teachers towards children in care remains mixed, with some children being labeled as troublemakers simply because of their looked after status.

There is evidence that children in care may encounter discrimination at school because of their status leading them to be stigmatized by other pupils and sometimes staff at school.

Many of the young people we spoke to were victims of bullying from their peers as a consequence of their looked after status (and often adopted status).

Even factors such as how children in care travel to school can make them stand out from their peers (if they arrive at school in taxis for example). **(BASW submission)**

### **Ensuring stability**

Frequent moves, poorly planned placements and inadequate support when placements become difficult, disrupt education and adversely affect achievements, even when a school place is maintained. A full assessment of the potential impact of any educational move accompanying a change of care placement is essential. **(Ofsted)**

'Stability can promote resilience for looked-after children in two respects: by providing the young person with a secure attachment (which can also reduce the likelihood of placement breakdown), and by providing continuity in other areas of the child's life, such as their school and their friendship group.'

'Being able to stay at the same school and avoid disruption to their education has a strong association with educational attainment for looked-after children. Care leavers who go on to higher education are more likely to have had stable care experiences, continuity in their schooling, to have been encouraged by their birth parents, and to have been assisted by their foster carers in their schooling.' **(p15 of Demos report)**

In addition to supporting better educational attainment, continuity in schooling can also make an important contribution to looked-after children's broader wellbeing, as Dixon et al have commented:

'[School] may also provide a source of structure and stability in an otherwise troubled life and can provide a forum for developing positive self-esteem and confidence either through

formal or less formal non-academic achievements, such as sport, music or getting a part in the school play. It is important therefore that young people are able to continue to participate in their education with as little interruption as possible'. *(p91 of Demos report)*

Indeed, when asked what they most enjoyed about school, our panel of young people in, leaving or having left care were most likely to mention the friends they had made at school, suggesting that the social and emotional stability that schooling can bring makes the frequent change of schools even more important to avoid. *(Text messages sent as part of the Be Heard Young People's Panel on Education, Office of the Children's Rights Director 2011)*

One of the key issues in terms of educational attainment is stability of placements so that looked after children do not have to constantly move schools and disrupt their learning progress. *(The Centre for Public Scrutiny submission)*

Educational achievement and placement stability are highly correlated and placement moves in the two years leading up to GCSE are especially damaging. *(DfES 2006 Green Consultation Paper)*

Children in stable placements do relatively well educationally whereas those with several placement moves show a steady decline. *(O'Sullivan & Westerman, 2007)*

Sadly a large proportion of moves are done because of administration, not because of bad behaviour. It has a devastating impact on self esteem. *(Sonia Jackson)*

The relationship between placement stability and positive educational outcomes has been a strong theme and one that must form the bedrock of any decision-making around both placement and schooling.

### **Providing leadership**

There is a clear link between the rates of care leavers who enter education, employment or training at the age of 19 and the effectiveness of local services, especially the effectiveness of their leadership and management. *(Ofsted)*

#### **Corporate parents**

'Corporate parenting and birth parenting should not always be seen as mutually exclusive. The state should be recognised as capable of acting as a 'parallel parent' for children and families who need such ongoing support.' *(p27 of Demos report)*

Greater political awareness of children in care is significant. When they are elected, all councillors take on the role of 'corporate parents' to children looked after by their local authority.

Although some improvements were identified in the ability of elected members to carry out their role of corporate parent, there is still too high a level of ignorance and disinterest among elected members in their looked after children population.

#### **BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE**

London Borough of Barnet run the Education Champions Scheme, whereby senior officers, including public sector partners in police and health, take an active interest in the education of a child in care, promoting high academic expectations and 'opening doors' to additional

opportunities. It has helped raise awareness of children in care across the authority as well as coincided with a healthy improvement in GCSE results.

- RECOMMENDATIONS
- To ensure these responsibilities are understood and elected members can be held properly accountable, elected members should have more direct contact with children in care councils.
  - Each elected councillor should be encouraged to take an active and personal interest in the educational progress of a child in the care of their local authority and where appropriate act as their mentor and point of contact within the Council.

**Virtual School Heads** ‘The education system is run for the benefit of children not schools’ (*Virtual School Head*)

Evidence to the inquiry was consistent in reporting that it was the leadership of a school which reflected how the staff and peer group viewed the looked after population in that school.

A knowledgeable head teacher and senior management team is vital, but too often missing. Introduced in the 2007 White paper, Virtual School Heads (‘VSHs’) were officially piloted in 11 local authorities with a remit to act as the local authority coordinator and champion to help tackle this deficiency and bring about improvements in the education of looked after children.

Unlike designated teachers (see below) they are not a statutory role.

An evaluation by Bristol University in 2009 was generally positive. It found that the Virtual School Heads had:

- helped raise the profile of looked after children in schools and at senior level within local government;
- heightened the importance given to education by social workers and by the local authority generally;
- played a key role in helping education and social care services work more effectively together.

Ofsted has spoken of the emerging evidence of the strong contribution of the VSH in improving educational outcomes for looked after children. (*Ofsted submission*)

This is amply illustrated by the published looked after children services Ofsted inspection reports that show a majority reporting positively about the work of virtual schools and the large contribution they have made to raising the profile of educating children in care.

The DfE has also acknowledged the positive impact that VSHs have had:

‘Where a virtual school head is in place who knows about the attainment of looked after children as if they were in a single school and provides challenge and support to help them make progress, this is a clear demonstration that a local authority is fulfilling its duty (to promote the educational achievement of the children they look after).

Many local authorities have chosen to appoint a virtual school head or someone with a similar title to undertake the role and there are some positive statements from Ofsted reports of children's services about how this is working.' (DfE website)

Those appointed to the role (some full-time some part-time) were almost exclusively senior educationalists, with many having social work-related experiences and/or involvement in special education.

Their positions varied in seniority, with most being at head of service or assistant head of service level, predominantly placed in the education section of children's services.

The virtual schools varied widely in size, function and structure. This is not surprising given the broad spectrum of looked after children populations in each local authority and the range of ages and abilities amongst pupils. The VSH role tended to be mainly strategic in nature. Some VSHs interpreted their remit as ending at Year 11 whilst others remained actively engaged.

The interaction with pre-existing LACES (Looked After Children's Education Service) teams also differed, with some authorities integrating their teams into a virtual school structure and others being directly accountable to the VSH.

Analysis of official educational outcome statistics showed that, over the period of the pilots, the 11 authorities performed well compared to the national average and showed most improvement in GCSE results. Ofsted have said that there is emerging evidence of the strong contribution of the 'virtual head teacher'.

It was seen to have helped embed good practice by providing strong strategic direction at senior level within local authorities and at the same time to be cost effective. This was particularly successful where the VSH had previously held school headships and was now placed at a sufficiently senior level to enable them to exert particular influence and operate more effectively.

The research concluded that there would be advantages to integrating VSHs into LACES teams to provide strong leadership and to avoid duplication and confusion within local authorities.

The North West group of VSHs we met as part of the inquiry was clear that VSHs need real 'clout'. We were concerned to learn that some authorities are disestablishing virtual school heads, not assisted by the voluntary aspect of the role.

Data management was also identified as an issue, with VSHs finding it difficult to access quality information on each child.

**BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES**

**Hackney** Have a team consisting of a head teacher, deputy head, qualified teacher, 0-5 learning mentor, two social pedagogues, occupational therapist, 14-16 learning mentor, two educational employment and training advisors and an eLearning manager. This has resulted in tangible improvements in educational performance.

**Kensington & Chelsea** Virtual School is a truly personalized education service modeled on the concept of a mainstream school with a head, primary and secondary teachers, with a prime focus on attendance and attainment. 1:1 tuition in the child's home, in-class teaching assistant support, Saturday school, residential revision classes, gifted and talented summer schools, providing educational materials (including subscribing to The Letterbox Club and looking to set up an e-learning platform).

After just one year in operation, this new virtual schooling approach increased the number of looked after children in the borough attaining 5 plus A\*-C Grades at GCSE from 5% to 33%, saw a drop in the number of NEETs from 43% to 11% and brought about a significant increase in attendance at school.

**Bristol** Has a large population of children in care. This means that the VSH's role is concentrated on strategic issues, using the Education of Children Looked After Service (ECLAS), known often as the LACES team, as the operational arm of the Virtual School. This consists of: a Virtual School governing body; a Senior Leadership Team; a Situations of Concern group; Pupil progress meeting; and a School Improvement Partner. The monitoring and tracking arrangements are in place from age three to age 16 with a view to extend it post-16.

Despite some excellent examples of the VSH making a positive contribution to educational attainment of looked after children in their local authority area, it is clear there remains much confusion about both the nature and status of the role of the VSH, which varies from one authority to another. Formalising the role would help address this.

In doing so it is important to remind social workers that they are not absolved from their own responsibilities in driving up education attainment amongst their care population and they should be working in partnership with VSHs to make this happen.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is clear from our evidence that there needs to be a senior individual who has oversight of and responsibility for the educational achievement of looked after Children. Increasingly it is the Virtual School Head fulfilling that role.
- We recommend that the appointment of a senior individual in the form of a Virtual School Head be clarified as a statutory requirement for Local Authorities and that such a person is a nominated officer in terms of the April 2011 regulations and guidance for looked after children and care leavers (reg 10).
- A Virtual School Head needs to be a senior Local Authority officer, but also they need to have direct access to key senior education and care post holders within the Authority including Directors and Assistant Directors of Children's Services.
- To ensure resources are better targeted to address the statutory requirements to improve the educational achievement of Looked after Children, the Pupil Premium and other grants should be allocated to the Virtual School Head for effective, targeted and traceable distribution. This will also encourage some degree of evaluation of the impact of this development.



- A national Virtual School Head information and data exchange system needs to be developed. This will help in particular with Out Of Area placements.

### Designated teachers

Section 20 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 ('the Act') places a duty on the governing body of maintained schools to designate a member of staff (the 'designated person') as having responsibility to promote the educational achievement of looked after children who are registered pupils at the school.

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (Designated Member of Staff for Pupils Looked After by a Local Authority) (England) Regulations 2009, made under Clause 20 subsection 3 require that the designated person is:

- a qualified teacher or
- a head teacher or acting head teacher or
- a person who has been carrying out the role of promoting the educational achievement of looked after children for at least six months prior to the regulations coming into force. Such an individual must be taking steps to become a qualified teacher and satisfactorily complete an induction period of required to. It is a further requirement that the governing body of the school be of the view that there is a reasonable prospect of fulfilling the conditions laid down in the Regulations by September 2012.

2010 statutory guidance makes it clear that there should be clear chains of accountability within local authorities when discharging their duties to promote educational achievement of looked after children.

The level of seniority of a designated teacher is important. They must also really want to do the job, not have it foisted on them because 'someone has to do it'. Concern was raised in the evidence given to the inquiry about the variability in the way the role was practiced.

Some schools have heavily prioritised the position of designated teacher and ensured it has gravitas and teeth by appointing a very senior member of staff to the role. This has in turn helped raise awareness amongst staff, governors, carers and young people themselves.

However, where teachers already had a full work load being a designated teacher was often seen as a burden.

The inquiry was told that the role in primary school was viewed as very different to that in secondary school, with primary schools often appointing the head teacher or their deputy to the role of designated teacher. Secondary schools were far more hit and miss.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Stronger emphasis on the requirement that the person designated is a qualified teacher.
- The designated teacher must be a member of the teaching staff with appropriate seniority, professional experience and status to provide leadership, training, information and advice to others that will influence decisions about the teaching and learning needs of looked after children.
- The head of a school may not always be the best person to act as the designated

teacher in terms of always being able to provide advocacy for looked after children.

- There may be a benefit in a formal consideration of having all designated teachers in a Local Authority as associate members of the Virtual School.
- Mechanisms need to be put in place to make sure that the designated teachers attend training to keep them up to date with recent developments.
- As recommended elsewhere they should also receive training on how best to identify and to manage issues such as trauma, attachment and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

**School governors**

School governors are in a powerful position to encourage and promote the educational attainment of children in care placed in their school.

Some schools have taken it upon themselves to nominate a governor to champion all looked after children in their school, usually in conjunction with their role representing children with special educational needs.

DfE guidance ‘Supporting Looked After Learners’ states that schools should seriously consider having a nominated governor and policy for children in care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- All schools should have a governor nominated for children in care, including a remit to promote their educational excellence.
- Efforts should be made to identify and encourage more people with experience of care to become school governors.
- School governors should work closely with the VSH and be open to challenge from them on their policies in operation in their school to promote the education of children in care.

**Sustained support**

Identifying needs and support early.

**Early years**

Evidence to our inquiry suggested that, where properly implemented and carried through, interventions in the early years can have a tremendous and long lasting impact on the future outcomes of children in care, particularly in relation to their education.

The often quoted piece of research that contends you can fairly accurately predict the educational outcomes of a 24 year old when they are just 24 months old lends support to this approach. As already stated in the introduction, we agree with the conclusions of Graham Allen MP in his recent report on early intervention and would argue that for children in care it is of even greater and more acute significance.

As David MacKinnon, VSH for The Wirral, said ‘in order to support young people in care to access further and higher education, we need to increase the number of young people successfully completing their secondary education. In order to do that, the most significant factor is an appropriate effective stable care placement.

This requires continued progress with training and recruiting foster carers. Secondly children need to enter secondary school being able to read and write, perform basic maths and have a level of emotional stability. This requires that the appropriate level of support is given in the early years and in primary schools. Without success at this level, there will be no success later and no amount of resource at this (later) stage will make up for the earlier losses.'

Poor support learning in the early years is still evident and needs addressing both in the home and in child care settings.

There is a growing recognition of the importance of the home environment for early learning (*Coghlan et al 2009*). For those children who find themselves in care before compulsory school age, those crucial early years may well define their future academic and personal achievement in years to come. Educational support at home, along with other forms of social, behavioural and emotional support, is crucial if we are to equip vulnerable young children with the basic bedrock of skills needed to fulfill their academic potential.

However, it is also worth noting the view of Sonia Jackson, who asserts in her research that early adversity is not necessarily a barrier to educational success. She cites a sample of unaccompanied asylum seekers who had come to England from 20 different countries. They had all been looked after at aged 14 or older and had previously achieved low academically, yet all went on to university having displayed a level of educational promise.

Nevertheless, it has to be right that we continue to provide unqualified support to looked after children in their education, regardless of the age they enter care or their previous success and application. We should never write them off in the same way we would never give up on our own children. It is also the logical conclusion that the task is made all the more easier if the building blocks have been put in place from as early an age as possible.

## Personal Education Plans

The importance of tracking each looked after child's educational progress, as well as ensuring the right type and level of support is provided at all times, is reflected in the development of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for children in care.

All looked after children must have a Personal Education Plan which is reviewed regularly in conjunction with their Looked After Child (LAC) review. The PEP forms part of their care plan.

There are statutory requirements for the completion of PEPs which were described to the inquiry as both essential and distracting.

Although the statutory nature of the PEP does mean that local authorities will make sure that PEPs are completed, we were told that often there is too much concentration on time scales and not enough focus on the plan.

Indeed, evidence to the inquiry showed a massive variability in both their quality and their implementation, more likely to be poor when it was social-work led. They are not always regularly used and the timescales were not always properly adhered to. Young people are often not aware of them, let alone involved in their implementation and progress.

There was also concern raised that some social workers continue to take the view that the very act of completing the PEP itself is 'job done' and the 'box being ticked', regardless of the quality of the plan and whether it really does meet the child's individual needs. PEPs should never be seen as a static document, but should always be regarded as a 'work in progress'. This is part of a wider problem whereby statutory guidance is all too often failing to be interpreted by social workers and others within the context of individual children and then applying it in their practice.

Paragraph 78.2 of the Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children Statutory Guidance 2010 says that the social worker with responsibility for the child should ensure that the PEP is formally reviewed and that its effectiveness is scrutinised as part of the statutory review of the Care Plan (ie after 20 working days, three months, six months, and six monthly intervals thereafter, and at other times if necessary).

Evidence to our inquiry strongly advocated that PEPs should be reviewed at the beginning of each term rather than on an arbitrary six month basis so as to have more relevance to the school year. Artificially fitting in with Child Care reviews means PEP reviews often coincide with school holidays and lack relevance and information more in abundance in term time.

There should also be a long term plan set out from the very inception of a PEP.

In Hackney they monitor all PEPs with educational psychologists.

There was a problem identified during the transitional phases of looked after children's education, particularly between primary and secondary. **(Catch 22 submission)**

During these crucial periods, it was felt that the value and rigorous implementation of the PEP all too readily disappeared.

Similarly the movement of a looked after child from one local authority area to another increased the likelihood of the PEP being lost in translation with sometimes poor communication between different local authority teams adding to the difficulties in making PEPs portable.

In London efforts have been made to address this problem by developing a London wide PEP that made them easily transferable. Although a national standardised PEP would in our view be too rigid, cutting down the size of PEPs to a base level of necessary information to which individual actions pertaining to each child can be added may assist with their portability.

There is also a strong case for PEPs to transcend the whole period of a child's time in care and beyond to help ingrain a discipline of long-term planning which is all too often lacking. Some local authorities such as Hackney run PEPs from 0-25 and we see much merit in this approach. It ensures that the importance of education is being considered right from the very start of their entry into care and beyond leaving care into adulthood.

It also ensures that social workers and carers are focused on the child's education from the day they enter care not from the day they (often belatedly) start school. The simple fact of

the PEPs existence, however, is irrelevant unless the support identified in the PEP is forthcoming and the professionals charged with delivering its objectives do so in a multi disciplinary way.

It was strongly suggested that unannounced inspections of PEP files would help ensure that they were kept up to date and actioned accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- PEPs should be reviewed each term rather than biannually to match the school planning structure. This does not affect statutory timescales.
- PEPs shouldn't be restricted to the period of compulsory education and should transcend a child's time in care. The 0-25 model adopted by Hackney should be the norm.
- The size of PEPs also needs cutting down to help improve portability. Although a 'national PEP' has its advantages and attractions, it could also stifle the close tracking of individual and personal progress. A basic model template (electronic if possible, an ePEP) could provide consistency and portability without preventing personalization.
- Attendance at a Personal Education Plan review must include the school and carers.
- The social worker must attend the initial Personal Education Plan but it may well be more appropriate for a lead professional to attend the Personal Education Plan meeting in lieu of a social worker.
- Other relevant professionals should be invited to a Personal Education Plan meeting provided that they are able to make a significant contribution to the plan.
- Children and Young People must have a say in the planning for their education, but it needn't be obligatory for them to attend the formal PEP meeting.
- Ofsted should consider the unannounced inspection of PEP files.
- The PEP, although part of the care plan, should always be regarded as a core document in its own right within any care proceedings and be submitted as part of the original application.

**1:1 tuition**

Research suggests that direct work, in particular 1:1 tuition, is both popular with children and foster carers as well as being effective in raising attainment and sustainable. 'Children value the individual support they receive from adults, and especially their carers and teachers.' (*C4EO Report*)

The previous government recognised this in their report: Raising the Educational Attainment of Children in Care (DCSF 2009, p7):

'We know that this group of children particularly benefit from personalised support.

Early evidence suggests that one-to-one tuition is a particularly effective way of providing this support for children in care, and so the VSH should ensure that children in care are able to access one-to one tuition wherever appropriate.'

Evidence to the inquiry demonstrated that a focus on 1:1 tuition is of particular benefit to children in care and contributes positively to better educational progress.

It was also noted that 1:1 tuition shouldn't be regarded by teaching staff as a panacea and that they should feel able to trust their individual professional judgments in deciding whether a different setting (for instance a smaller group) would be more appropriate for a specific child in maximising their prospects of educational success.

**RECOMMENDATION** ■ Children in care must be able to access 1:1 tuition (or smaller group tuition) where necessary. The Pupil Premium (and any Pupil Premium Plus as recommended) offers a financial source for such work.

**Mentoring** 'The one key thing is to have a role model and someone who believes in you and pushes you.' (*Clare Edge, Care Leaver*)

Learning mentors can be invaluable. They were described to us as 'firefighters' moving from school to school. In Lancashire the work carried out by three learning mentors was directly responsible for saving 12 children from fixed-term exclusions.

They have the added advantage of working in the full knowledge of each individual child's circumstances and in the examples we saw (eg Hackney) their involvement from 0-5 upwards played a key role in pushing educational progress against a backdrop of sympathetic and tailored pastoral support.

There are several hundred thousand adult care leavers in the UK and they remain a vast untapped resource when it comes to helping and advising current looked after children and care leavers. (*The Care Leavers Association submission*)

University students' acting as mentors has also proved effective.

**BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE** Tim Clare works as the Looked After Children Project Worker for Leicester City Council. As a former looked after young person and university graduate, he is well placed to help improve the educational services and outcomes for children in care in his Borough.

As he told our inquiry, 'My aim is to inspire them and make them realise that they shouldn't view the system negatively but actually as an opportunity.'

His primary responsibility is to advocate on behalf of all looked after children in the city and to take their views and wishes to elected members and senior members of staff and lead that work through a powerful and vocal Children in Care Council.

Tim has also produced a DVD about his care experience and how he overcame the barriers in front of him that is both shown in schools and used as part of the training for designated teachers. He follows it up with an informal Q&A session to, as he says, 'narrow the gap between the care and non-care population'.

**RECOMMENDATIONS** ■ Learning mentors should form part of the Virtual School model at every stage of the child's education and development.

■ There should be a recruitment drive to encourage older care leavers who have been through the education system to take on mentoring roles (as done so successfully by Tim Clare in Leicester).

- There should be a campaign to recruit university students as mentors and role models to looked after children in secondary education.

### Admissions and Exclusions

Keeping children in mainstream school is very important (*Sonia Jackson*). It is therefore critical that any change in school is timely and doesn't compromise the quality of education and support.

#### Admissions

Current legislation and recent revision of the Admissions Code continues the position that looked after children have the 'highest priority' in admission to schools.

Nevertheless, looked after children remain disproportionately more likely to attend the weakest schools.

Is 'highest priority' in admissions achieving the outcomes for looked after children in providing access to the best school for them and their needs?

The overwhelming view from the evidence we received is that, despite the strongly worded admission code, children in care continue to be sold short on school placements, partly due to the lack of urgency once a new school placement is needed, partly due to genuine choice and partly due to the lack of a pushy corporate parent not accepting second best.

This is particularly acute when children in care are moving schools outside of the normal transition periods ie in the middle of a school term.

One suggestion made to the inquiry to overcome this problem was to change the wording of the Admissions Code of Practice from 'once *directed*, the governing body *must* admit the child at any specified time during the school year, even if the school is full' to 'once *an application is made*, the governing body *must* admit the child at any specified time during the school year, even if the school is full.'

Certainly we agree that a review of how the Admissions Code plays out in practice for looked after children and whether more needs to be done 'on the ground' is necessary to ensure children in care are not missing out on the best educational setting for them as an individual.

The issue is really about matching each child to the right school (this is also considered in the section on alternative educational settings). The right school for a looked after child might not be Ofsted outstanding but have the quality of pastoral support needed for them to flourish academically.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review of section 106 of the Education Act 2005 and section 50 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to ensure the envisaged practical effect is working as intended.
- Consideration given to the suggested re-wording of the Admissions Code designed to overcome the difficulties experienced by looked after children moving schools outside the normal transition periods.

**Exclusions** We are still seeing a disproportionate number of children from a care background being subject to temporary and permanent exclusion. *(BASW submission)*

In 2003 the Social Exclusion Unit noted that children in care were ten times more likely to be excluded than other children. That figure is now at four times more likely.

In their report 'Failed by the System: The views of young care leavers on their educational experiences' from 2006, 66 young people who had been in care and aged between 16 and 21 were surveyed about school exclusions.

Forty one had been excluded from schools for periods lasting between one day and two years. Twenty two had been excluded for more than 60 days and two had no secondary education at all. Eighteen had received no alternative education in the time they were excluded.

'Exclusion of children in care should be an absolute last resort. It is vital that schools and social workers work together in partnership with other professionals and try every practicable means to maintain them in school and to exclude them only in the most exceptional circumstances. Before excluding, schools, in conjunction with the local authority, should first consider alternative options for supporting the child or young person in care. No child in care should be excluded from a school without discussion with the local authority to ensure that there is suitable alternative provision available elsewhere.' *(Extract from 'Improving behaviour and attendance: guidance on exclusion from schools and Pupil Referral Units—2007 Guidance')*

Even with this guidance in place, there are still a disproportionate number of looked after children who are excluded from school or have low levels of attendance.

In the 2008/09 school year, 100 children who had been looked after continuously for 12 months at 31 March 2009 were permanently excluded from school.

Clearly there will always be cases where exclusion is the only option and it is important that the head teacher has the authority to make the decision on whether to exclude.

However, instead of addressing the underlying causes behind the behavioural and emotional problems exhibited in the classroom, schools can too readily resort to exclusion as a convenient and instantaneous means of dealing with the issue. *(Sonia Jackson)*

To alleviate such circumstances, there needs to be more work done with teachers, through initial and ongoing training, to help them understand more clearly what underpins the disruptive and difficult to manage behaviour that can be exhibited by children in care.

This will enable them to have the knowledge and skills to have the confidence to know what intervention is likely to be the most effective. Recommendations later in this report deal with how we can enhance teacher training to help decisions around exclusion to be smarter and effective.

In December 2011, the Government launched a consultation on revised statutory guidance and regulations for exclusions from schools and pupil referral units in England. The



consultation closed in February 2012 and the Department for Education intends to publish the revised guidance in time for the new exclusion process to begin in September 2012.

The latest school exclusion statistics from July 2011 do not include information on the number of children in care subject to exclusion.

We agree with the recommendation from the 2006 Barnardos report that annual statistics for school exclusions should include those for children in care and are pleased that on 28 March 2012 additional tables were added to the DfE: Outcomes for Children Looked After data, containing information on, amongst other things, absences and exclusions.

Exclusions drop where there is closer monitoring and quicker interventions. The recommendations set out elsewhere in this report should help achieve just that.

- RECOMMENDATION ■ Although it is important that the decision to exclude should be the preserve of the head teacher, it should be good practice for the VSH to be included in the decision-making process.

#### **Academies and free schools**

There are now 629 academies open in England, compared to 203 in May last year. one in six secondary schools is now an academy, compared with one in 200 primary schools.

Academies and free schools are subject to the same admissions rules as other schools

Although the inquiry did not take specific evidence on the role of academies and free schools in the provision of education for looked after children, we note and support the decision that academies and free schools, as part of their funding agreements, must appoint a designated teacher with qualified teacher status. PEPs will also be required.

- RECOMMENDATION ■ Although children in care are registered to a particular Virtual School where one exists, academies and free schools should be actively encouraged to work closely with VSHs, to ensure that looked after children are receiving the best and most appropriate support available when attending an academy or free school.

#### **Alternative educational settings**

##### **Residential settings and schools**

Around 10% of children in care are placed within a residential setting. Most of them are educated in local day schools, but for some of the most traumatised children in care a school within their residential environment is best placed to meet their emotional and behavioural needs as well as improve their educational outcomes.

In July 2011 the Department for education issued a data pack intended to help local authorities understand how residential settings can contribute to achieving good quality stable outcomes for the children they look after.

Although evidence to the inquiry on residential school settings was limited, we were able to learn of examples where it has been effective in both improving educational outcomes and transforming lives.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE	<p>The Mulberry Bush is an independent non-maintained residential school providing education and care for children, including those in public care, who have severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. Its strong emphasis on early intervention and personalised therapeutic support within a stable and safe setting has achieved some excellent results. Children who attend the school make 'good progress' in reading, writing, handwriting, spelling and ICT skills and 'outstanding progress' in speaking, listening, number and scientific enquiry.</p> <p>One hundred per cent of children at the school are able to be placed in a suitable school on departure, being able to learn and be taught. Ofsted have recently rated the school outstanding for the sixth year running.</p>
RECOMMENDATION	<p>■ A detailed analysis of the residential school setting estate should be carried out in order to verify the current offer to children in care across the country, to establish the social and educational impact such settings are making to overall outcomes and to explore how such settings could be better utilized in the future.</p>
<b>Assisted boarding</b>	<p>'Boarding is not suitable for every child vulnerable child but for the right children it can provide an opportunity for a really good educational and social experience, and can be the right place for some vulnerable children to flourish. It may be that for a small number of looked after children boarding will be the right option to meet their needs.' (Tim Loughton, Childrens Minister)</p> <p>'We need to consider ways to extend boarding opportunities for vulnerable children, where it can provide them with the combination of educational, residential and pastoral support lacking in existing family or care settings.' (Lord Adonis, former Minister for Schools)</p> <p>'Assisted Boarding' is the term used to describe the process whereby charities fund boarding education for vulnerable children, including children in care.</p> <p>Last year the Royal National Children's Foundation (an amalgamation of the RWCF and the Joint Educational Trust or JET), which currently places 350 children aged 7-18 in boarding schools, both state and independent run, set up the Assisted Boarding Network that is intended to build support for the plan among local authorities.</p> <p>In their report <i>Breaking Through—How boarding schools can transform the lives of vulnerable children</i> in 2007, the then Royal Wanstead Children's Foundation evaluated the development and outcomes of 97 vulnerable children. They found that 85% of those children were assessed as being at or above the average of their peers within three years of going to boarding school. Of the 73% assessed on admission as being 'at risk' of failing, almost half were rated as on or above their peer group average within three years.</p> <p>The boarding schools involved in the research had a strong emphasis on high levels of pastoral care, individual attention and structured living.</p> <p>As well as helping improve educational outcomes, the widening of 'foster boarding' has the</p>

potential to open up the options for prospective foster carers who work and may not be able to commit full time but can provide a loving and stable home in school holidays.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- We support this initiative and would encourage other local authorities to follow Norfolk and explore the boarding route as a viable alternative educational setting that can provide both stability and educational success for looked after children.
- The Department for Education should consider different financial models such as Social Impact Bonds that may help incentivise and encourage local authorities and others to actively pursue the merits of boarding as a potential best option.

**Out of area placements**

Cross border issues were a recurring theme during the evidence taken. A significant proportion of looked after children are educated outside of their local authority area. In many local authorities it is the quarter of all children in care placed Out Of Area ('OOA') who do least well educationally. In some local authorities the percentage of children placed OOA is even higher. In Peterborough for example the figure is 46%.

This is a particular problem amongst children in a residential care setting (about 10% of all children in care), amongst whom over half are placed OOA. (*DfE Children's Homes Data Pack July 2011*)

This is ironic when the cost of maintaining a placement OOA can often be as much as £250,000 per annum.

One of the inherent difficulties associated with OOA placements is the ability to track progress of children in care via the transfer and exchange of meaningful data between local authorities.

Cross-authority collaboration needs to improve.

There is also a real cross-border issue between England and Wales (as highlighted by Alison Peddie, VSH for Cheshire West and Chester) regarding differences in provision for excluded pupils and the interpretation of the 'belonging' regulations that is causing unnecessary confusion, with vulnerable children being caught in the middle. All local authorities should be encouraged to draw up cross-border protocols to ensure the least possible disruption to the child in question's education.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

The North East local authority region has developed a Cross Border Information Sharing Protocol to alleviate and expedite fallout from placement disruption, as well as use it as a method of sharing best practice.

RECOMMENDATION

- More rapid and appropriate communication between local authorities through the development of information sharing protocols and other methods is essential in promoting the achievement of Looked After Children placed outside of the Authority (Out of Area).

### **Educational support at home**

Stability by itself is not sufficient—it has to be combined with a carer committed to helping the young person and providing a supportive and encouraging environment for study (*Mike Stein—Resilience and young people leaving care p13*). This may include the foster families' own children providing help and acting as role models. (*Biehal et al., 1995; Jackson et al., 2003*)

Schools cannot alone improve educational outcomes for looked after children. (*Ofsted submission*) Support and encouragement at home for educational learning and development is a key factor in tackling the attainment gap. Good partnership between carers and schools is imperative. A whole 'family' approach that supports foster carers would produce better results. (*Catch 22 submission*)

As the Children Schools and Families Select Committee said 'For most young people in care, their most important relationship on a day-to-day basis is with their foster family'. (*Third Report of Session 2008-9, p39, para58*)

There is also evidence that a positive relationship between a child in care and their carer is important in helping young people who truant and who are excluded from school in returning to education. (*Baldwin, 1998*)

Foster parents are a key educational resource. With children spending on average just 20% of their time in school (often much less for children in care who have higher levels of absenteeism and exclusion), what goes on at home is crucial. Many care leavers attribute their success in accessing higher education to the support and interest shown by their carers.

In 2009 TACT asked young people in care 'which area of your life would you most like your foster carers to help you with?' The majority responded 'help with schooling' (63%).

When we asked young people in, leaving or having left care how involved their carer is (or was) in their education, a dichotomy of responses illustrated the extreme differences within each foster or children's home.

Some of the responses included: 'Not involved at all' (aged 16); 'my carers are involved they will always get me to go to school and make sure I do my home work (aged 13); 'when I was in care it felt like my carer was not too concerned about my studies which de-motivates you and you can feel quite lonely' (aged 24); 'very involved went to parents evenings and got me to do my homework really cared about my education it was a serious matter to them in fact they said wouldn't live with them if I wasn't in education' (aged 18). (*Text messages sent as part of the Be Heard Young People's Panel on Education, Office of the Children's Rights Director 2011*)

One young lady told the inquiry that her foster mother had discouraged her from going to university as it would prevent her from bringing in money to the household.

Recent efforts to 'normalise' the position of looked after children in the school environment by relaxing strict regulations placed on carers (such as the foster carer not being allowed to

sign consent forms permitting a foster child to have their photograph taken on a school trip), is welcome and has had some positive effect.

However, there was a perception amongst foster carers that local authorities and agencies did not welcome this as it meant the buck no longer stopped with them, leading to inconsistencies around the implementation of the guidelines.

There is also a sense amongst many carers that they are excluded from information and discussions about the education of children in their care.

The inquiry noted that attendance by foster carers at parents' evenings is not statutory.

The Foster Carers Charter was viewed as a welcome development that makes clear statements about the way that carers are treated as well as setting the expectation that they themselves will contribute positively and actively to the educational achievement of children in their care.

'When carers are willing and able to encourage and support young people educationally, and social workers assist them in doing this, there is strong evidence that young people benefit. Equally, when social workers do not take into account the views and experience of carers there is discontentment and low morale and motivation.' (*'Taking Care of Education' final evaluation report: Derby August 2006 p18*)

We should also remember that the crucial role carers play in embedding in children in care the essential and intrinsic value of education extends to carers in other settings too, including residential children's homes.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE

The SWIIS Education Service (part of the SWIIS Foster Care Service) allocate each young person an education worker who works closely with carers as well as social workers, birth parents (where appropriate) health staff and other key professionals, supporting them in dealing with educational issues, encouraging and facilitating 1:1 tuition in the home and out of school activities. Where this has been in place it has invariably led to improved attendance at school, improved attainment, reduced exclusions and fewer placement breakdowns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recruitment training for foster carers—strengthening of the component on supporting education. Training for foster carers and children's home staff should include how to make education the high priority it needs to be.
- More educational opportunities should be made available to foster carers, including the potential for them to study a foundation degree.
- The implementation of new fostering regulations designed to ensure foster parents are able to play the role of any parent looking after his or her own children, including in respect of their education, needs evaluating to ensure consistency across the country.
- Carers should be more actively encouraged to have greater involvement in the development and implementation of a PEP as well as in the identifying of the right support and interventions for the child in their care.
- Local authorities should provide more help to carers to enable them to communicate

more effectively with schools, for example by arranging dedicated early evening sessions for foster carers to meet key school staff at the earliest opportunity.

- The Minister for Children should write to fostering panels to advise them of the need to prioritise the issue of capacity of foster carers to support the education of looked after children in the approval process.
- The Minister for Children should write to fostering services to underline the importance of foster carers supporting educational attainment.
- Workforce development in relation to foster care should be included in the DfE Business Plan.
- More support should be given to providing key learning resources for foster homes eg Letterbox scheme, Fostering Achievement initiative run by the Fostering Network.

**Educational opportunities out of school**

Voluntary activities outside of school are also very important (*Sonia Jackson*). High achieving young people in the care system are characterized by having developed a range of out of school interests and hobbies that widen and infuse their educational base.

Educational opportunities away from the classroom can help build self-esteem and open up new interests eg after-school homework clubs. They also appear generally popular and sustainable.

There is evidence that the overall level of access for looked after children to extra-curricular activities has increased. (*C4OE*)

**BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES**

**Dawley 5 Centre** The inquiry heard evidence about the Dawley 5 Centre in Ealing that provides 1:1 study support sessions, university tasters and inspirational speakers and graduates attending to talk to, inspire and motivate young people.

**The Letterbox Club** This has also proved to have had a positive effect in raising English and maths levels through learning within the home (see above).

**RECOMMENDATION**

- Where at all possible children in care should be given the opportunity to experience learning and other life skills outside of the classroom to help increase their educational attainment and self resilience.

**Financial support**

**Pupil Premium**

All looked after children between reception and Year 11 who have been looked after for more than six months are eligible to receive the Pupil Premium. This is over and above the Dedicated Schools Grant ('DSG') funding per pupil.

The introduction of the Pupil Premium at the increased level of £600 per pupil was widely welcomed by contributors to the inquiry.

2011 data shows that just over 40,000 looked after children are eligible for the 2012-13 Pupil Premium.

With the current £1.25bn being spent on the Pupil Premium in 2012-13 due to rise to £2.5bn

in 2014-15, there is real potential for looked after children to benefit further.

A number of concerns were raised about the bureaucracy surrounding its allocation, the additional administration costs associated with its distribution and the mechanisms for establishing how the money benefits the child's education directly.

The introduction in September 2012 of the online publication by schools setting out how they have spent their Pupil Premium goes some way in addressing this last concern, although there remains a role for Ofsted in assessing the real impact the Pupil Premium has in helping drive up the educational achievement of children in care.

The removal of the statutory requirement to provide a Personal Education Allowance has created inconsistent earmarking of budgets within local authorities for improving the educational outcomes for looked after children.

A compelling case was made to the inquiry for children in care to be eligible for additional funding for educational support over and above the Pupil Premium, potentially in the form of a Pupil Premium Plus (PP+), in order to reflect their often deep rooted barriers to education resulting from their pre-care experiences and the additional support that demands. The doubling of the Pupil Premium budget in 2014-15 gives ample scope to provide these vital additional and targeted resources.

A strong argument can also be made for the Pupil Premium (and/or PP+) kicking in for looked after children *before* the age of 4 so that their disadvantage is tackled at the earliest opportunity. This would dovetail with the earlier introduction of the PEP.

Currently schools control the Pupil Premium and how it is spent. It is of course a delegated sum giving schools discretion on how to spend it. Some looked after children live and are educated in a different authority to the one which looks after them.

The DfE decided that it would allocate the premium to the local authority which looks after the child, but where the child was educated in a mainstream setting, the local authority would be required to pass on the full level of the premium to the school or academy where the looked after child is being educated, including where that school is in a different local authority - around 30% of looked after children are educated outside their home authority. **(DfE *The school funding settlement for 2011-12: The pupil premium and Dedicated Schools Grant*, 13 December 2010, pp8-9, paras 24, 25 and 26)**

VSHs have very little say or control over how the Pupil Premium is used within schools or Local Authorities. Indeed schools are under no obligation to inform VSHs how the Pupil Premium is practically applied, making it far more difficult to plan interventions that are joined up.

It was suggested that Virtual Heads need to be able to challenge how it is being used as if not managed properly it could get lost in school budgets.

It was also suggested that there would be considerable advantages to the VSH controlling or at least having access to a specific budget, made up of the Pupil Premium (and any Pupil

Premium Plus advocated in this report) plus a proportion of the Early Intervention Grant, so that they can commission appropriate and timely services and interventions when needed. They could then act as an effective ‘honest broker’ in the pursuit of educational achievement for looked after children. It may also help reduce the administrative costs associated with the distribution of the Premium.

The restricted portability of the Pupil Premium at a time when Out Of Area placements remain at unacceptably high levels, coupled with the difficulty in getting the money to follow the child were further weaknesses identified in the early implementation of the new payment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- We recommend that a Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) be introduced for looked after children sufficient to ensure that all necessary support in pursuit of educational excellence is available. This will help plug the gap of funding uncertainty and consistency that currently exists, as well as demonstrate a practical acknowledgement of the deeper rooted problems children in care have when accessing education.
- DfE should also explore the merits of the Pupil Premium kicking in for looked after children from before the age of 4.
- As recommended above the Pupil Premium (and PP+) should be allocated to the VSH to ensure the money is spent smartly and in a coordinated way. The VSH would also be in a strong position to distribute the Pupil Premium in accordance with the PEP process.
- The Pupil Premium and PP+ should follow the child.
- Ofsted should focus specifically on the impact of the Pupil Premium in improving educational outcomes as part of its school inspections (see below).

**Personalised support**

**Children with complex learning and behavioural needs**

Within the care population there is a disproportionately large number of children with deep seated and complicated learning and behavioural difficulties that require specific personalised interventions and additional support beyond that which would be standard.

Despite recent initiatives, ‘there remains a worrying deficit in the provision of educational support services for looked after children with challenging behaviour and/or significant learning needs.’ (*Barnardos submission*)

In trying to understand why, the C4EO review recognised that ‘there is a serious lack of evidence about the complex learning and behavioural needs of many looked after young people and the ways in which they do or do not benefit from recent policy.’ (*C4EO*)

Despite the importance of educating children in mainstream school where possible, for some children school is both a frightening proposition as well as being ill-equipped to meet their significant needs.

Above is an example of a therapeutic residential school that provides education and care for children with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Mulberry Bush School has a good track record in bringing about educational improvements in some of our most



damaged children by instilling in them a better ability to concentrate, stay in the classroom and cooperate with others. The average cost is £138,000 per child per year and the outcomes are not easily translated into tables or graphs, but it is a measure of the school's impact that on leaving 57% of children return to their home communities and 84% of children who on entering the school were unable to be placed long term with a family are able to do so by the time they leave. It is also the case that 100% of children are able to be placed in a suitable school on departure, being able to learn and be taught.

In mainstream school, a pro-active SENCO (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) can be an invaluable asset in helping meet each struggling child's particular needs, but there remains concern that provision of this support is sporadic.

RECOMMENDATION

- The Department for Education should commission a study into the current provision of educational support services for looked after children with complex learning and behavioural needs both inside and outside the classroom with a view to identifying deficiencies to address and best practice to follow.

**Gifted and talented**

As with their peers, some children in care will demonstrate evidence of being particularly gifted and talented. Sadly, as a consequence of their looked after status, these gifts are being too frequently overlooked, meaning children in care missing out on the opportunities that being on school based gifted and talented programmes can bring.

Any gifted and talented child in care needs to be identified as early as possible, and nurtured accordingly, with closer co-ordination between VSHs and school based gifted and talented programmes.

RECOMMENDATION

- There should be a drive to recruit looked after children into school based gifted and talented programmes with designated teachers, carers and social workers helping VSHs nominate children they determine display the potential and/or meet the criteria.

**Recognising achievement**

The vast majority of local authorities celebrate the individual educational success of their looked after children in annual awards ceremonies. This is to be both applauded and encouraged.

Young people in care we spoke to had happy memories of these evenings, telling us they made them feel 'special' and 'good about myself'. This is backed up by the C4EO Report that found young people in care valued any recognition and celebration of their achievements.

Some VSHs have developed this into educational 'superstars' events.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Annual awards ceremonies celebrating the achievement of looked after children's academic success should, if not already, be the norm.
- There should be an annual national awards event supported by the Department for Education and with celebrities with a background in care encouraged to get involved as mentors and supporters of the awards.

### Coordinating education with social care

'Social care and education are inextricably linked and shouldn't be viewed as separate. Not enough young people in care are benefiting from consistent and good levels of support in schools and this is usually exacerbated by poor working relationships between social care and education in some parts of the country.' (*BASW submission*)

The Social Care Unit report in 2003 into the education of looked after children highlighted the lack of joint working between staff in different departments as one of a number barriers that continue to dog progress on raising attainment.

Although there is some evidence that communication and liaison between social care services and schools has improved (*C4EO Report p34*), we heard evidence that currently there was a lack of strategic planning, with planning being done in isolation, mainly due to a lack of connection between the individual professionals working with young people in care. For example, VSHs in the North West Virtual School Network told us that there is still a gap in understanding between schools and social care that needs addressing.

There is a growing recognition that a closer and more proactive collaboration between education and social care (not to mention health) has huge benefits.

The social pedagogy model, although not fully and comparatively evaluated in the UK, does demonstrate signs of being effective in integrating care and education.

#### BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

**YiPPEE (Young People in Public Care, Pathways to Education in Europe)** This social pedagogy in children's residential care pilot programme is a model of professional practice that recognises the role of education in care contexts.

**Kensington & Chelsea** Education and social care work in a coordinated way; the Virtual School has acted as an education advice service for social care, and through training, specifically aimed at teaching social workers about how the education system and schools operate and leading both social workers and carers during the admissions process and in cases of exclusion. Also held an Education Conference that brought together foster carers, social workers and LAC health services together with the education services to facilitate dialogue and learning between them.

By bridging the gap between education and social care, VSHs can also help remove barriers to learning support.

#### RECOMMENDATION

- A full and proper evaluation of the social pedagogy model within the UK should be carried out with a view to establishing its ability to integrate front-line delivery of care and education and to improve educational outcomes for children in care.

### Tackling emotional and mental health

'What is the point of going to school if children are totally distracted and unable to concentrate or learn anything because of their emotional turmoil?'. (*evidence of Dr Rita Harris to the Children Schools and Families Select Committee 2008-9*)

'Emotional and behavioural problems have a strong association with placement breakdown. Placements may disrupt if children's carers feel unable to cope with their challenging behaviour. Placement instability can then exacerbate children and young people's mental health problems, increasing their vulnerability to further placement breakdown. Children need to receive high quality emotional and professional support and stable placements from the start of their care journeys to address these problems and build their resilience.'  
*(p16 of Demos report)*

As our experience in Hackney demonstrated, improving educational outcomes for looked after children depends on a close partnership between health, education and social care. Similarly, as noted by the Social Exclusion Unit in their 2003 report, 'Educational outcomes are strongly influenced by a child's emotional, mental and physical health. School can boost a child's health through raising self-confidence and self-esteem, enabling participation in sports and access to health education.'

This was backed up by the feedback from children to C4EO that 'emphasised strongly the overlap between improving their emotional and behavioural health and improving their educational prospects.'  
*(C4EO Report 2010 p33)*

The new care planning guidance and regulations stipulate that looked-after children must receive a full health assessment, including an assessment of their emotional and mental health, either before the child is first placed with the local authority or within the first month of their entry to care.

This is certainly a welcome development. However, the 2009 statutory guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children admitted that although the rate of assessments is improving, there is still significant work to be done to ensure that the plans which follow the assessments are implemented. (p130 Demos report)

The 2009 guidance, like the BAAF survey, also found 'substantial local variation in the availability of mental health services' for looked-after children and issued guidance that dedicated CAMHS services had to be made available in every area.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy was sighted by some practitioners as being a highly effective tool in reintegrating vulnerable young people back into education, particularly during difficult transition times.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Demos recommended that the DfE makes mental health assessments of children entering care mandatory, using a standardised multi-disciplinary measure. *(p29 of Demos report)*
- We support that recommendation. Initial assessments of looked after children should be improved to better identify their mental health needs and, with input from educational psychologists, establish the impact those needs may be having on each child's education.
- We agree with and repeat the recommendation of the Children Schools and Families

Select Committee in their report of Session 2008-9 entitled 'Looked-after Children' in that children in care should have guaranteed and prioritised access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

- Greater training needs to be provided to teaching staff to improve their understanding of and ability to manage issues such as trauma, attachment and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

### **Giving children a voice**

Article 12 of the UN Convention asserts the right of children to be consulted on matters that concern them.

'Meeting the needs of looked after children also means listening to and, where possible, acting on their views, including when they may have difficulty in expressing them themselves. The best local authorities and carers actively engage young people in shaping services, such as through peer support and giving direct feedback to senior council leaders.'

*(Ofsted)*

'A key component of Care Matters was to put the voice of the child at the heart of the care system' (DCSF, 2009 p.3)

This was borne out by the development of Children in Care Councils and the appointment of Children's Commissioners. We also have the Children's Rights Director and the Independent Reviewing Officer amongst others advocating on behalf of children in care.

The 'Corporate Pledge' (a promise to all children and young people living in care in a local authority area, written with the help of the Children in Care Council) has been another innovation that includes promises around education. For example the East Sussex pledge on education, training and employment promises children in care to:

- make sure you can attend a nursery when you are aged 3 and 4
- make sure you get a place at the best possible school
- make a personal education plan that is helpful to you and that gets you any extra support needed to help you learn and achieve your qualifications
- expect your carers to take an active interest in your education, attend consultations with teachers, and encourage and support you to do your homework to a good standard
- where possible arrange meetings that don't involve you coming out of class, if that is what you want
- make sure that you have access to IT and other equipment needed for education/training
- support you financially onto further education and university

Despite these plethora of advocates for children in care, the education and care system does not involve looked after children well enough in decisions about their future. The Children's Care Monitor survey in 2009 indicated that just 18% of looked after children and

young people considered that their opinions rarely made a difference to decisions about their lives. *(Ofsted)*

Young people feel empowered if they have a voice and a say in their future but often this does not happen leaving the young person feeling insecure and lacking in self belief. *(The Care Leavers Association submission)*

For example some young people we spoke to were either unaware of the Pledge or were unsure what it entitled them to, let alone how to raise concerns that it was not being adhered to. Similarly we were told that 'making cared-for children aware of their options, giving them regular feedback and having someone to follow through with them is what is important.'

RECOMMENDATIONS

- All councils need to give consideration to their arrangements for enabling looked after children to meet elected members. A letter to all elected members from the Secretary of State reminding them as corporate parents of the importance of meeting with and listening to children in care and their educational experiences would be worthwhile. Indeed, the Children's Minister has already led by example by holding regular quarterly meetings with groups of children in care and separately with care leavers so he can fully understand the challenges they face at school at in other settings.
- Children in Care Councils should be made aware of local councillors' overview and scrutiny role so that issues around their education can be fed into policy and decision-making processes and to contribute to service improvements. *(CfPS submission)*
- We echo the recommendation of the then Children Schools and Families Select Committee in their 2008 report that the role of Independent Reviewing Officer in holding the local authority to account, especially on issues surrounding looked after children's education, would be significantly strengthened and would command much greater confidence amongst children and carers were it to be made *truly independent* of the local authority.

**Focusing training**

There is a lack of targeted training around education for social workers. As a consequence there can be limited understanding of the education system and how it can work for and against children in care.

There is also a lack of understanding at the school chalk face of the massive impact early trauma, neglect and abuse has on children's social and emotional state and how this has a knock on effect for their behaviour and learning.

'Many looked after children are hyper vigilant, stress rampaging through their bodies. How can you settle down to school work, to anything when you don't feel safe?' *(CfPS submission)*

The inquiry received evidence that suggested historically the range of educational focus and academic achievement amongst foster carers was extremely variable.

The attitude of foster carers is a big factor (in them achieving academically). Children who did best were in families where older children were in higher education. (Oral evidence of Sonia Jackson)

Having foster carers and residential workers who are confident in dealing with the education system is a vital factor and training should be mandatory for all. **(BASW submission)**

Teachers need training on trauma and attachment issues and the impact they have on education. (The Centre for Public Scrutiny submission)

**BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES**

**Kensington & Chelsea** The Virtual School provides training to social workers about how the education system and schools operate and training for foster carers and residential home workers in how to support young people with their home learning.

**BAAF's Fostering Education Project** Intensive training is offered to foster carers to enable them to support young people in attaining good educational outcomes has demonstrated a high success rate. An evaluation of the 51 children who took part in the pilots found their reading accuracy increased on average by 36 weeks and their comprehension by an average of 44 weeks. The retention rate for the course was close to 90%.

**RECOMMENDATION**

■ Greater and more regular formal and informal training needs to be provided for all those involved with children in care, including early years staff, schools (including designated teachers) and corporate parents, on how best to identify and manage issues such as trauma, attachment, emotional development and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

**Inspect the right things**

**Outcomes driven**

The new inspection framework for children's services departments will come into force from May 2012.

From January 2012, under the revised school inspection arrangements, inspectors are focusing more sharply on those aspects of schools' work that have the greatest impact on raising achievement.

The framework goes on to state that:

'Inspectors are required to report on the quality of education provided in the school and must, in particular, cover:

- the achievement of pupils at the school
- the quality of teaching in the school
- the quality of leadership in and management of the school
- the behaviour and safety of pupils at the school.

In reporting, inspectors must also consider:

- the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school
- the extent to which the education provided by the school meets the needs of the range

of pupils at the school, and in particular the needs of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs.'

In relation to the monitoring of the achievement of pupils at a school, the framework says: 'When evaluating the achievement of pupils, inspectors consider (amongst other things):

- how well gaps are narrowing between the performance of different groups of pupils in the school and compared to all pupils nationally'

Although this insinuates the inclusion of looked after children as a comparative group it is unfortunate that here or indeed anywhere in the framework there is no specific reference to children in care.

As Professor Sonia Jackson points out, it is almost impossible for those in care to follow a normative educational path and reach the expected level at 16, although, as we saw during our inquiry, many remain highly motivated and can achieve later on given the opportunity.

This should be reflected in how Ofsted track the progress of looked after children through the educational system. Inspecting the right things means the careful and consistent monitoring of those outcomes derived from specific and targeted interventions.

Ofsted point out in their own submission to the inquiry that inspection evidence indicates four main influences that have a particularly positive impact in improving educational outcomes for children in care:

1. Higher aspirations
2. Effective support to help looked after children to achieve
3. Stable placements and relationships
4. Sufficient time given to ensuring the 'voice of the child' is heard.

We wouldn't disagree, and would expect the pursuit of such outcomes to be reflected in what and how Ofsted inspect the educational experience of children in care as a distinct group.

We welcome the proposals put forward by Ofsted, as part of their inspection of all 'non-association' independent schools, where it pertains to looked after children in independent children's homes registered as education providers, where there is a comparatively lower proportion achieving good or outstanding educational provision.

In particular, the fact that the proposed new framework will focus on the educational progress and achievements of looked after children and look critically at what schools are doing to close the gap between their achievements and other pupils is welcome.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ofsted should keep looked after children as a distinct group for inspection purposes rather than as part of the 'all vulnerable people' group so that their progress and the impact of specific interventions, support and initiatives on their outcomes, educational and otherwise, can be better tracked.
- As part of their evaluation schedule, Ofsted should inspect the Pupil Premium

(including the PP+), how it is spent, and the impact it is having on educational outcomes.

### **Adoption**

There is some evidence that children who are adopted do better educationally than those who remain in foster care (*C4EO Research Review: Improving educational outcomes for looked after children and young people p4*)

The evidence we received from adoption charities and agencies as well as from adoptive parents suggests that there is a strong sense of double standards between the support available to children in care who are fostered and those who were in care and have now been adopted.

This is despite adopted children often having a similar range of mental health, emotional and behavioural difficulties brought about by their early life experiences.

'You know there's a pupil referral type thing to rebuild confidence and get people talking ... get the kids back to doing some studying - but you could only go if you were fostered. The fact that they (the adopted children) had exactly the same problems and needs ... oh no.'  
(Adoptive parent)

Many traumatized looked after children have essential educational services withdrawn once an adoption order is granted. (*Adoption UK submission*)

While looked after children have priority in school admissions, this has not been the case for adopted children. Recently announced changes to admissions policy that for the first time recognize the particular needs of adopted children by also giving them priority is an important and welcome step.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- We welcome the inclusion of adopted children as 'high priority' cases for admissions.
- We would encourage the Government to look closely at how the educational needs of adopted children can as a consequence be better and earlier assessed so as to provide them with the right support, educational and otherwise.



# Post-16 education of looked after children and care leavers in England

Post-16 education cannot be looked at in isolation from the compulsory education system. That is as true for looked after children and care leavers as it is for their peers.

As made clear at the beginning of this report, what happens in the very early years of education (and life) has a significant impact on what young people and care leavers are able to achieve.

Many of the issues in post-16 attainment have similar themes to those in the primary and secondary system, a large number of which would be less prominent if tackled earlier in life.

Much of the work around looked after young people and care leavers currently focuses on GCSE attainment and the numbers who progress to university. Although these are important indicators, it is important to address the factors behind these statistics as well as the way in which outcomes are measured in relation to care leavers' peer groups.

## Where we stand in post-16 education

In recent years there has been a welcome and increased focus on the education of young people in and leaving care beyond statutory schooling age.

Key additions to legislation have changed the way in which we regard care leaver status and extended the responsibilities of the corporate parent to support these young people in their educational endeavours.

**The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000** put in place the first statutory requirement for local authorities to support young people aged 16- 24 in their (full time) education. This was strengthened through an additional local authority duty enforced by the Children Act 2004 to promote the educational achievements of young people in their care.

**The Children and Young Persons Act 2008** brought forward a statutory £2,000 local authority bursary for young care leavers at university in direct response to recommendations from the By Degrees research project final report, *Going to University from Care* (Jackson *et al*, 2005).

More recently, **The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers** implemented a new suite of regulations and guidance from April 2011 which strengthen the importance of pathway planning during the transition stage of young people leaving care, extend a young person's right to a personal advisor to the age of 25 and, for the first time, recognises the central role that further education and training personnel should take in planning ongoing educational transitions for young people who continue studying beyond the age of 16 years. The fact is that periods of transition are both very important and fraught with danger for these particular children and young people.

There is no doubt that these valuable changes to legislation coupled with key non-legislative support measures have impacted upon the number of young people choosing to continue in education beyond school. The recorded figures of care leavers in education has risen from 1% in 2003 to 7% in 2009 and the number of young people gaining the appropriate level 3 qualifications to enable access to further education options has also risen.

While there has been increased statutory responsibility, a growing level of attention and focus on the education outcomes of care leavers and more detailed tracking of progress, there is still some way to go to ensure that the educational outcomes for young people from care are comparable to the rest of the population as well as set against their pre-care experience.

There were a number of recurring themes in the evidence to the inquiry crucial to positive outcomes in post-16 education, in particular:

- the importance of good advocacy and accessible guidance and information;
- proper, meaningful and deliverable planning for transitions;
- the intrinsic value of stability,
- transparent admissions;
- clear, consistent and timely financial support reflective of need;
- more use of mentoring;
- better quality assurance;
- targeted training to improve practitioner awareness of the importance of ongoing education and learning post 16;
- wider work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.

This section will explore these in more detail and consider a range of resulting recommendations, a number of which overlap with those made in the first section of the report.

### **Advocacy and support post-16**

The importance of having someone who takes an active interest in championing the needs of young people in their care was a key concern for young people who submitted evidence to the inquiry. The 'someone who' took on many roles for different looked after young people and care leavers and in different instances could be a carer, a mentor, a teacher or youth worker.

*'Make sure that the young person is supported throughout their schooling not only by social workers, but also teachers and people where they live to help them succeed'* (Young person)

A lack of training for professionals on the education of young people in and leaving care was viewed by all sectors as an area in need of great improvement. Indeed, one of the main obstacles to education achievement reported by young people was the lack of information and understanding held by their key advocates. Young people felt that the lack of staff and carer awareness of education is a main barrier to education progression, not their own ability or will to achieve.

#### **Foster carers and residential workers**

As discussed in the first section of this report, where looked after children have a foster parent who is interested and actively involved in their education, they are more likely to do well. Concerns about the ability of carers to participate in education because of their own background are much more defined in post-16 education.

The inquiry heard from carers who do not feel equipped to promote education due to a lack of training or lack of personal experience in post-16 education, and from those who feel left to advocate for their young person alone without the support they need from professionals.

Care leavers also articulated the importance of this role saying that one of the hardest things about being in care and trying to do well in education was ‘Not having the support at home to help you succeed and learn’ (oral evidence, care leaver).

Not only are some carers uncertain about the details and processes involved in of post-16 education, some felt unclear about their responsibilities regarding the education of young people in their care, especially beyond statutory schooling.

There is no employment requirement for foster carers to have a commitment to supporting education and learning of the young people they look after.

If a foster carer has negative experiences of education they can be understandably misguided regarding education opportunities and reticent to actively promote education to their young people (The LACHE Report, 2009). Information on education options and training on how to support their young person in education will be of benefit to both carer and the children in their care.

**BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES**

**Where carers make a difference** A care leaver student who was interviewed by the inquiry described his foster carers’ attitude to learning as having a direct impact on his educational achievement. Although she hadn’t attended university, his foster carer had strongly promoted higher education and encouraged him to apply. She viewed him as a positive role model for her birth daughters to follow.

**Link workers** The inquiry heard evidence of Independent fostering agencies promoting a carers own educational progression and the importance of positive engagement in a child’s education at home. Central to this was the involvement of a link worker for foster carers, on hand 24/7, to assist the foster carer in areas where they may be uncertain or need support.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

As in section one, we recommend:

- Recruitment training for foster carers - strengthening of the component on supporting education. Training for foster carers and children’s home staff should include how to make education the high priority it needs to be.
- More educational opportunities should be made available to foster carers, including the potential for them to study a foundation degree.

**Virtual school heads**

Throughout this inquiry, concerns were raised that a number of virtual head teachers (or equivalent) do not always have a remit or strategic influence beyond compulsory school age when responsibility for looked after young people is transferred to the Leaving Care Team.

For young people in and leaving care over the age of 16—many of whom will need longer than their peers to reach their desired attainment level in education—this can mean a loss of strategic support from their local authority and the removal of a key educational advocate.

Best practice, as demonstrated in Hackney below, sees virtual head teachers (and virtual schools) adopting a 0-25 years policy for young people in or returning to education. We believe this role would have greatest impact where the PEP and Local Authority strategic planning also runs from 0-25.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Virtual School Heads should retain responsibility for care leavers from the age of 0-25.
- Extending and strengthen the role of the VSH by making the position statutory. This will allow the VSH to have real weight within local authorities, hold schools to account and ensure the continuity and quality of learning and support beyond 16.
- Examine the possibility of VSH control of the pupil premium budget (and any pupil premium plus that may follow) for looked after children together with priority access to a proportion of the Early Intervention Grant.
- Virtual School Heads should sit on Local Safeguarding Children’s Boards.
- PEPs should run from 0-25

Designated teachers

The statutory role of the designated teacher was found to be working well in schools where responsibility is taken on by a member of staff with the correct level of seniority, time and (importantly) interest in the role.

This role does not however extend, in a statutory sense, to students in post-16 education, although positive anecdotal evidence confirms that a number of schools with post-16 provision extend the role of the designated teacher to encompass a whole school approach.

The idea of a Designated Teacher may take a modified form in a Further Education College or University but the role is no less important. College and university advocates are a source of support for young people from care who have moved on from school to another source of provision who can help to manage the always critical transition from one institution to another. This point of contact is important not only as a ‘someone who’ but as a source of information and stability at what can be a challenging time for those in care.

Without a requirement for a statutory advocate, post-16 institutions often consider support for young people from care as part of the wider ‘vulnerable learner’ provision which fails to identify students from care and meet their specific needs.

As with children in primary and secondary education, where a college or university employed a member of staff with the remit to support looked after children and care leavers, students felt well supported and institutions were more likely to have enhanced communication links with the corporate parent (including social workers, personal advisors and carers).

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

**Kent and Medway** The Designated Member of Staff (DMS) Scheme in Kent and Medway is a collaboration of the county’s further education colleges and universities, working closely with corporate parenting services to promote and support the education of young people in and leaving care.

Through the Scheme, each college and university nominates and trains at least one member of staff to act as the designated member of staff (DMS) for care leavers at the institution. DMS, often from a student services department, are the operational advocate for young people studying or planning to study at the institution, the main contact for agencies working around the young person and are responsible for raising the general awareness for looked after children and care leavers to staff within their college or university.

The connection between institutions and local authorities facilitates communication across agencies and eases transitions from school to college and through to university.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Department for Education should commission a study into the current level of designated teacher support in post-16 education and consider the introduction of extending the statutory requirement to appoint a designated individual to the post-16 education sector. This should also examine the level of seniority required for this position to be effective.
- The Department for Education should promote the idea of a Designated Member of Staff in further and higher education as best practice.

Teachers and education providers

‘If the government wants to improve the lives of young people in care, then they have to understand young people in care, and they must educate the schools and colleges’. (Young person)

While a Designated Teacher is a key role within the educational life of a looked after young person, that teacher is not with the young person in every lesson, every day. The support given by ‘normal’ teachers within the school setting is hugely important.

During this Inquiry, training for education staff was viewed as a gap in provision that can act as a barrier to the educational achievement of young people.

Some young people spoke passionately about good support networks in school sixth-forms, colleges and universities, while others described experiences distinctly lacking in an understanding of young people from care resulting in the young person ‘dropping out’ or alterations resulting in suspension or exclusion.

Staff training on issues of attachment and the effects of trauma were suggested (Ofsted, Buttle UK, Centre for Policy Studies) along with a general overview of the care system workings of local authority care teams and/or Virtual Schools. It was felt that training for teaching and support staff in education institutions should form part of their CPD programme.

An area that we have not specifically concentrated on in this inquiry but should be touched on here is the need for training and awareness about the re-integration of young offenders from care back into education. The inquiry heard from a prison educator on the many issues young people face, both in accessing education during their time at a youth offenders centre and in being able to continue this or similar education routes once released back into the community.

It is important that staff are aware of issues that young people may present with at College

and appropriate and flexible means of supporting these students are put in place to ensure solid and focused progress in their studies.

**Mentors** Mentoring was viewed very positively by respondents to the Inquiry, with a number of best practice examples being raised including the Horizons Centre and Dawley House in Ealing and the national Aimhigher Associates Project which ran from 2009-2011 nationwide.

Where mentoring projects run well, they offer a range of educational, emotional, social and practical support.

A number of different participants in the inquiry remarked upon the positive use of young people from care as good role models and it was felt that peer mentoring for young people in care should, where possible, be undertaken using trained mentors who themselves had grown up in care and therefore understood the complexity of issues faced by their mentees.

*'Describing the requirements of a mentor [to someone who hadn't been in care] would be like describing the colour blue to a blind person'* (Care leaver mentor)

The Care Leavers Association described adult care leavers as a 'vast untapped resource' of positive mentors and role models for young people in and leaving care. They felt that many older care leavers who have succeeded in education and employment would be willing to train as mentors for young people if such a project were available.

It also provides a potentially powerful means of helping develop self-care, practical and interpersonal skills in the young person leaving care.

The practices and recommendations put forward in part one of this report are equally applicable to post-16 education.

- RECOMMENDATIONS
- Local authorities should promote the use of peer mentors and the use of 'home grown talent' as utilised by Leicester City Council
  - Local authorities should support and develop a care leavers mentor pool.

**Social workers** For social workers and foster carers, a lack of understanding about education options beyond school and existing beliefs about the value of different education or employment routes can have a big impact on the views of their young people.

One of the main difficulties cited by local authorities was that training specific to education (including post-16) that was on offer is not mandatory for foster carers or social workers.

Engagement in any training delivered was often dependant on the individual's interest or chosen professional development.

There was also a view that social workers supporting young people transitioning from care and care leavers see other aspects of support (such as housing) as greater priorities than education (Calderdale).

- RECOMMENDATIONS
- CPD for social workers should include updated training on the educational development of young people from a care background and periodic review of the education system

and options available to young people (as those options change).

- Greater weight should be placed on education in initial social worker training.

**Guidance, information and independent advice**

Guidance for young people and their supporters needs to be clear, comprehensive and timely. Young people spoke of their need for information tailored to their situation and available when *they* need it. They would like the opportunity to hear about the support available to them in all stages of education more than once, rather than ‘information overload’ with an expectation that they will remember everything they’ve been told.

They would like to be able to access information on education all in one place, perhaps online, but stressed the importance of someone only explaining and confirming their options in person, face to face.

Care leavers are more likely than their peers too need longer to accomplish their goals in education. For them, post-16 education and the world of adult education (generally thought of as 19 years+) are closely linked.

For this reason, as with VSH and PEPs, it is important that correct advice and guidance is provided as they progress through the system.

Because of its very nature, the new all age careers service, Next Steps, has the potential to help manage the transition of care leavers through their post-16 education, skills, training and work life in a very meaningful way.

It was clear throughout this inquiry that many young people were still unclear of their right to HE pastoral and financial support, despite the fact that all local authorities are required to publish this information, and more needs to be done to guide and remind young people about important education and careers information when it is relevant to them.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Training should be provided for all Next Steps advisors so that they understand the needs of care leavers and the support and funding structures that are in place for them.
- Efforts should be undertaken to ensure that detail of pastoral and financial support is readily available and clearly explained—young people in care and care leavers must know as a matter of course what options are available to them.
- A single reference point should be developed (online and in print) setting out all those institutions that have been awarded the quality mark to help aid career and educational decisions.

**Transitions in post-16 education**

As discussed in part one, transitions within the life of young people in care should be carefully managed with regards to their education—this is no less relevant at post-16.

To the young people we spoke to in the course of this inquiry, stability was the most crucial factor to their achievement in education. The transition from compulsory to post-compulsory education was considered a time of instability and uncertainty.

For some this transition represents a fresh new start away from 'everyone' knowing that they are/have been in care. However, it also often coincides with a young person leaving care, sometimes moving out of foster or residential care and into their own accommodation or supported housing and learning to live independently.

For those moving on to university, it can mean moving to a different city and living in student accommodation away from support structures, friends and family.

There is still an assumption that young people leaving school are fully fledged adults able to make it 'on their own', without the level of support they are entitled to at school (as addressed in the Demos report for Barnardos, section 15) and throughout this inquiry there was a common theme that young people felt that when they reached what most would consider 'adulthood' they would be left on their own.

This was echoed by one carer who said that 'looked after children are a priority for primary and secondary schools but the support finishes at 18, when they are most vulnerable to peer pressure.'

Without clear lines of responsibility and open communication between all professionals with a current or previous responsibility of care, young people can be left feeling insecure and unsupported.

Planning for post-16 education should be a consideration for carers, social workers and teachers throughout the educational life of a looked after young person - the PEP should assist in putting this issue on the agenda.

But planning for post-16 education should not simply revolve around the choice of training or education and the institution a young person will attend. It must seek to address the common concerns and anxieties young people in care often have housing, financial support and continuity of their placements.

As one young person said to the inquiry, 'it is hard to concentrate on what you should be doing in your education if you don't know where you are going to live'.

But where support is available, stable and accessible it can have a direct impact on the attitude and ability of the young person to succeed as one care leaver told the inquiry:

'It was a wonderful and positive experience for me in many different ways: living in a different town; coming into contact with so many different young people; and completing my fairly intensive course, successfully gaining a 2:1. ... I have a positive view of my life ahead, largely due to being so well supported' (Young person)

### **Transitions—Pathway Planning and the PEP**

The importance of Pathway Planning was raised, with concern that young people are still moving on to college and university without an up-to-date pathway plan and therefore are unsure of what support they are entitled to receive from their local authority.

The involvement of a professional from education in a young person's pathway planning at 16, as now required in line with volume three of the Children's Act 1989 (Planning Transition



to Adulthood for Care Leavers, p15), was viewed as crucial to ensuring that the continuing education priorities are well planned and accommodated during transition from school to sixth-form, college or training provider.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were brought into question for their lack of statutory requirement in post-16 provision. Although general issues were raised concerning the quality and accountability of PEPs in pre-16, it was still felt that a post-16 PEP would assist an effective transfer of support and communication from schooling to post-16 provision important to the transition process for all young people who continue in education.

Transition support from local authority leaving care teams was viewed as patchy, with some young people happy with the support they received while others felt that the support could be improved.

One of the key factors to those who believed they received 'good' support was the role of a central and consistently available figure who they could contact with questions, problems and concerns.

VSHs interviewed felt that more could be done to ensure that a young person's social worker continued to be their constant source of support during the crucial transition year when a young person turns 16.

The change of social workers at 16 is seen as disruptive and, if a change of personnel needs to happen, the transition would be better placed at the end of the academic year to avoid disruption at a sensitive time in a young person's education.

**BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLE**

**PEPs** Hackney local authority run PEPs for all their young people in education aged 0-25 years. They see PEPs as a key way to stay in contact with young people's education needs beyond statutory schooling age: '16-25 must be tracked, all parenting seems to stop then if we don't monitor what is going on.' (Hackney Children's Services)

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Guidance should be issued to ensure that all relevant educational support available is reiterated at each PEP to ensure that young people know what support is available.
- Work should be undertaken to establish at what point a young person should move on to a new social worker and which advocate is the most appropriate 'central source' of advice and guidance.
- There should be mandatory Pathway Planning at transition stage from statutory to post-compulsory education where the 'outgoing' and 'incoming' educational advocates are equally involved.
- Any change of social worker should be in line with the academic year, not by birthday.
- Roll out the 'Staying Put' scheme which helps looked after young people to remain in previously stable fostering placements until they are 21.

**New Transitions**

During the course of this inquiry, New Transitions was published by the DfE. This is encouraging, not only because it acknowledges that there are issues around the transition period

to post-16 education for looked after young people. The guidance (now released) aims to increase the opportunity for young people to re-enter education after the age of 21 with the support from their local authority which this inquiry welcomes.

Current practice was felt to unduly pressurise young people to achieve educationally within an unrealistic timeframe for those who have suffered disruption pre-care, in schooling and at home.

### **Outreach, mentoring and raising aspiration**

Raising young people's educational ambitions is pivotal. Young people and professionals alike stressed the impact of aspiration raising events to the decisions of care leavers. While this must be addressed (as discussed earlier in this section), through carers and the home environment, there is a plethora of best practice that is having a tangible impact through mentoring, charities and local authorities.

'I was lucky enough to have the chance to try student life for five days at Northampton University. This was certainly beneficial as it gave me a taste of what Uni-life was about and certainly fuelled my desire to apply for an undergraduate degree.' [young person]

#### **BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES**

**Horizons Centre, Ealing** '18% of Ealing LAC go onto HE because people tell them that's what their future holds, whereas rhetoric in other places is that they just want to keep them out of prison.' (Oral evidence)

The Horizons Centre in Ealing is a resource for those aged 13-25 plus, providing rounded support for children in care and care leavers—educational, emotional, social and practical.

This support takes the form of classes, sessions, social events, trips and drop-in support from staff. As the centre is open six days a week until 7pm, young people can come and go as they please, to see staff or meet friends, and use it as a 'safe' space.

A typical week of activities might include after school study support and homework help, which is available every day from a team of six teachers, health sessions (eg on substance abuse or emotional health); music and arts classes; cooking classes; or a trip to a gallery or museum. In addition to formal activities, there are also study suites with PCs, a kitchen, a laundry and showers, aimed at young people who may be living on their own without adequate facilities.

Horizons is also a centre for peer mentoring, with young people in years 10 and 11 and those who have moved on to university acting as mentors for others who are still in school. In addition to direct benefits of advice and support for mentees, this scheme builds social networks, enables mentors to contribute and give something back, and encourages them to stay in touch with the centre well into their 20s.

In Ealing, 18% of care leavers were offered university places in 2009. Across England, only 7% of care leavers go on to university. (*p220 of Demos report and a site visit by members of the inquiry team*)

**Education and leaving care** Bristol local authority educational expert—they appointed a senior teacher as a key member of their leaving care team focusing on educational opportunities. They act as a cross between a mentor and a one-stop educational advice service. Within five years the number of care leavers at university increased from 1 to 18. This is a unique appointment in England and one that merits wider consideration as best practice.

**Cambridge University** In 2011, Cambridge University, through their Admissions Office, launched Realise, a project designed to encourage more young people in care to consider Higher Education. The project includes the organisation of regular open days and taster days for children in (or previously in) care. A travel fund has been established to ensure cost of travel is not a barrier to participation. In October 2011 over 150 children in care across 24 local authorities attended a science day, debates day and humanities day. Foster carers and teachers are also encouraged to take part.

- RECOMMENDATION ■ Raise awareness and promote early outreach and aspiration by increasing activities such as university visits and taster sessions.

**Education providers and their role for looked after young people**

The range of further and higher education providers and courses is vast and sometimes confusing for young people and their carers. Enrolling in a course often presents a change of institution, surroundings and maybe even city. For this reason, post-compulsory education providers have an important role to play and should have a central role in post-16 PEPs.

BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES **Frank Buttle Mark** Specific support for young people who have had a background in care is not a statutory requirement of providers offering education provision beyond the age of 16, however best practice has been championed through a commitment to care leavers developed by the charity Buttle UK in their Quality Mark; 86 higher education institutions currently hold the Quality Mark recognising their enhanced commitment to care leaver students.

In 2010-11, Buttle UK successfully piloted a Quality Mark for further education (FE) in 25 FE colleges across the UK. The extension of the Quality Mark to FE institutions was viewed positively by the Inquiry as an example of best practice extending beyond the requirements of legislation.

One care leaver told the inquiry that ‘the Frank Buttle Mark was absolutely crucial and I would not have been able to do my Masters degree without the Trust.’ (*Tim Clare, Project Worker in the Social Care and Safeguarding Unit, Leicester City Council*)

- RECOMMENDATION ■ Roll out the Frank Buttle Quality Mark to all providers of further and higher education.

**Applications, admissions and transparency**

The admissions procedures of post-compulsory education have improved in recent years as awareness of the needs for looked after children and care leavers in education grows.

The introduction of the UCAS ‘tick box’ on applications to university has enabled HE institutions to know the number of prospective students who have been in care.

This information has led to many best practice examples of support for care leaver students including, but not limited to: pre-entry support, access to 365 day accommodation, extended deadlines, guaranteed admission interviews, HE care leaver bursaries, a dedicated member of staff for care leavers, peer mentoring and enhanced communication links between local authorities and universities.

There was some scepticism from young people as to whether the UCAS 'tick box' would be of any practical help, other than tracking student numbers. It was thought that if by ticking the box a care leaver would automatically receive extra, clear information about what help and support was available, it could prove useful.

However it was very clear that this should not be the only means of communicating the information as a number of looked after young people may choose not to 'tick the box' in order to avoid any singling out or stigma.

Where there is additional support for care leavers over and above the support offered to all 'vulnerable learners', that support is at the discretion of the higher education institution.

It is often the responsibility of the individual young person to research the support they are eligible for at each institution before they apply.

It was thought by young people and Virtual School Heads alike that some simplification or help with this process would be advantageous.

The admissions procedures for further education differ because there is no central admissions portal equivalent to UCAS; individual FE Colleges often have their own application forms and pre-enrolment requirements.

A number of FE Colleges have mirrored the best practice of UCAS and included a care leavers tick box on their application form or ask the question at interview, but it is not known whether all FE Colleges run a similar procedure.

With the introduction of the 16-19 Bursary (discussed further in section 7), colleges now have a mechanism for collecting information about students who are in care or care leavers and it is the wish of the Inquiry that this information will be used by FE colleges to implement wider college practical and pastoral support measures to assist their population of students from care to succeed in FE.

Because the majority of further education qualifications are free at the age of leaving care, there is less concern about the tuition fee aspect of continuing in education.

If a student choose to remain in a Further Education College rather than move to higher education, there are more likely to be concerns about maintenance costs than course costs.

RECOMMENDATION

- Relevant government departments should discuss with UCAS and Frank Buttle UK the possibility of a comprehensive online database where looked after young people can compare the offer of different institutions for people in their situation.

### **Financial support**

'There is no point in talking about education if financial support is not in place'. (Young person)

The financial support offered to young people in and leaving care has been an area of controversy for some time. The figure of £2,000 local authority bursary for any young care leaver attending university full time was drawn from research by the Institution of Education (*Going to University from Care, 2005*) as the amount of average debt incurred by care leaver students over and above that of their peers not from care.

Concern has been raised that this figure no longer accurately reflects the financial support required for successful Higher Education study, especially in light of the raised tuition fees from 2012-13. The figure of £2,000 also fails to recognise the extra financial support that many local authorities offer in addition to the bursary, which differs by local authority.

Many local authorities are concerned that they will no longer be able to support all young people who wish to attend university if the percentage of applications continues to rise and local authority budgets are not revised to reflect this change.

The recently published guidance, *New Transitions*, additionally implements a new duty on local authorities to support entitled young people who wish to return to education over the age of 21 and request the financial support of their local authority.

This guidance was not published at the time of the Inquiry, and therefore wider comment on this legislation was not observed.

The new 16-19 Bursary, which came into effect from September 2011, replaces the previous Educational Maintenance Allowance ('EMA') financial support package. Young people from a care background fall into the 'vulnerable' category that guarantees them a bursary of £1,200 per year; however it is at the discretion of each 16-19 education provider to decide how this financial support is given to young people and rather than being a cash payment, it can be 'in kind'.

At the time of the Inquiry, young people interviewed were very concerned about the removal of EMA and stressed the importance that the planned 16-19 Bursary would be money 'in their pockets', not in kind.

Generally, the young people interviewed for the Inquiry had mixed views on the financial support for post-compulsory education. Some young people spoke very positively about the financial support they had received from their local authority while others were unsure what they were entitled to.

There was a general feeling of unease and uncertainty regarding the increase in tuition fees and a perception at least that the decision on whether or not to progress to university was a decision whether to go into 'masses of debt' in order to gain a higher education qualification. Without a financial safety net young people were understandably debt averse and very

aware of their own financial difficulties. Unlike many of their peers, they did not have the luxury of parents to 'bail them out' if they got into financial trouble.

Issues were also raised concerning the varying level of staff funding allocated to LAC and after care services in different local authorities.

The inquiry heard an example of two local authorities where the smaller Local Authority (A) has a 12 person strong LAC team whereas it's much larger neighbour (B) has a LAC team of only two staff. The variation in local authority staff provision was viewed as a 'postcode lottery' (BASW) with local authorities committing different emphasis of staff time on education, employment and training (EET) leading, in some, to a lack of implementation of legislation, systems and practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To ensure all children in and leaving care are aware of and receive any financial support to which they are entitled, the Department for Education should write to each Director of Children's Services and remind them of their obligations. We also recommend that the DfE publish the data on delivery by local authorities in complying with this duty in line with new performance tables.
- The Department of Education should build on its recent publication of single-page information leaflets on the entitlements for children in care and care leavers by clarifying the entitlements of young people with respect to the 16-19 bursary and the support on offer from individual educational institutions.

**Quality assurance and monitoring progress**

The importance of quality assurance is true for all areas of support for young people in and leaving care and the impact of quality on the range of services and support measures for young people cannot be underestimated.

However, there were two areas of particular quality assurance and measurability that came to light as key factors to the educational attainment of young people, namely the quality and range of data collected to measure the educational outcomes of young people and external recognition of good practice in educational services.

Data capture, analysis and dissemination were highlighted as a crucial measure of the educational outcomes for young people in care.

Figures concerning young people's GCSE attainment and the number of recorded care leavers in higher education are used as key national indicators of improvement in the educational achievement and, to an extent, are used as the main quantitative evidence for the improvement in the quality of services and support for young people in care.

However, the Inquiry found that there is a frustration from professionals about the type and focus of data collected on young people's educational attainment at both a local and national level.

Issues were raised concerning the use of 'snapshot' yearly data as representative of the

care population, a lack of longitudinal data to track children’s educational progress over time, the comparison of care data with data on the total population as not ‘like for like’ and the shortcomings of official data in measuring the ‘value-added’ to a young person’s education after coming into care (Barnardo’s).

Concerning for the post-16 population is the lack of national data collection beyond the snapshot of numbers engaged in EET at age 19.

Local authorities may well capture their own data regarding the outcomes of young people in their care. However, this practice will vary across local authorities and, as there is no further national governmental collection of information, there currently isn’t a way of accurately capturing the specific EET outcomes of care leavers.

In order for the educational outcomes of young people from care to be improved, there needs to be a clearer indication of the current educational outcomes at all levels.

Because care leaves often take longer to achieve their educational objectives than their peers, it is possible that monitoring should continue over a longer period.

External recognition of good practice, whether that be from inspectorates such as Ofsted and the Office of Fair Access (OFFA) or third sector awards such as Care2Work and the Buttle UK Quality Mark, were spoken very highly of by the inquiry as means of assuring quality in the services for young people in and leaving care.

Both the From Care2Work and Buttle UK Quality Marks were viewed highly as non-legislative means of recognising best practice in institutions and local authorities who go the extra mile in their support of young people.

Ofsted reports were described as useful measures to assess quality and detail areas for improvement for both local authorities, schools and FE Colleges, however it was noted that the assessment of an FE College’s services for young people from care could be further enhanced and separated out from the general focus on ‘vulnerable learners’.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Assess what further data capture will aid policy making and monitoring of the impact of policy on the educational outcomes of looked after young people, including at what age the monitoring of outcomes should cease.
- Request that Ofsted produce a themed report on good practice in supporting educational attainment for looked after children and young people.

**Work experience and vocational opportunities**

‘We are the world of tomorrow, aren’t we?’ (young care leaver)

‘I think more work experience placements to give young people a choice to see what they would like to do when they leave school.’ (young care leaver)

Many of the young people we spoke to were considering vocational education and/or work experience. A common theme that arose was the difficulty in accessing these opportunities—especially in the current economic climate—because of the competition for places.

This inquiry notes, as did a number of the young people we spoke to, access to appropriate work experience or an apprenticeship either during or after their studies was beneficial in terms of their CV and experience but also in terms of proving to themselves, their employers, carers and social workers that they could perform in such an environment.

The inquiry heard from a number of work experience projects and apprenticeship schemes, which support young people into both paid and unpaid work environments and help build their CV.

The 'From Care2Work' project, managed and delivered by the National Care Advisory Service with support from the charity Catch 22, has been taken up by 150 local authorities. They themselves have engaged with over 400 local and national companies, including Tesco and The Marriott Group, offering between them 1096 work experience placements and 356 apprenticeships.

**BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES**

**Work experience and apprenticeships**

The Lambeth 'Steps to Success' project gives young people from care opportunity to apply for work experience placements, with support from their local authority.

It sometimes provides the 'nudges' needed by young people to help them succeed—in one instance a support worker said this had simply been a phone call on a morning to make sure the young person was out of bed—a role a parent would typically perform.

The London Borough of Barnet has developed a successful apprenticeship scheme for care leavers working in a number of council departments, including children's centres and libraries.

Gateshead City Council has committed to allocating 30% off their apprenticeship places to looked after young people and care leavers.

It is worth noting that some young people will positively shift their attitudes back towards education and training once they have spent time in the world of work (Allen, M, 2003).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Build on the government announcement of 80,000 work experiences places to actively encourage private sector employers to offer at least one work experience opportunity to a care leaver each year.
- Build on the work of the From Care2Work programme in conjunction with the National Apprenticeship Scheme to incentivise more businesses to offer apprenticeships to care leavers.
- Promote best practice where it exists in local authorities, especially in the creation of dedicated work experience and apprenticeship places for care leavers. Recently revised statutory guidance (para 5.15 of The Children Act 1989 Vol. 3 (Guidance and Regulations: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers revised 2010)) goes some way towards helping with this issue. Nevertheless, achieving the Care2Work quality mark should be a route by which local authorities can improve their offer to care leavers as well as their rating.



# Recommendations

*Recommendation  
directed towards\**

**Information, guidance and communication**

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. More rapid and appropriate communication between local authorities through the development of information sharing protocols and other methods is essential in promoting the achievement of Looked After Children placed outside of the Authority (Out of Area).  | LAs                          |
| 2. Promote best practice where it exists in local authorities, especially in the creation of dedicated work experience and apprenticeship places for care leavers. Recently revised statutory guidance (para 5.15 of The Children Act 1989 Vol. 3 (Guidance and Regulations: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers revised 2010)) goes some way towards helping with this issue. Nevertheless, achieving the Care2Work quality mark should be a route by which local authorities can improve their offer to care leavers as well as their rating. | LAs                          |
| 3. The Minister for Children should write to fostering panels to advise them of the need to prioritise the issue of capacity of foster carers to support the education of looked after children in the approval process and write to fostering services to underline the importance of foster carers supporting educational attainment.   | DfE                          |
| 4. A national Virtual School Head information and data exchange system needs to be developed. This will help in particular with Out Of Area placements.   | LAs                          |
| 5. Efforts should be undertaken to ensure that detail of pastoral and financial support is readily available and clearly explained—young people in care and care leavers must know as a matter of course what options are available to them.  | LAs/care<br>leaving services |
| 6. A single reference point should be developed (online and in print) setting out all those institutions that have been awarded the quality mark to help aid career and educational decisions.  | Buttle UK                    |
| 7. Guidance should be issued to ensure that all relevant educational support available is reiterated at each PEP to ensure that young people know what support is available.  | LAs/DfE                      |

\*LAs Local authorities; DfE Department for Education; BIS Department for Business Innovation and Skills; DoH Department of Health; FE colleges Further education colleges; HEIs Higher education institutions; IFAs Independent Fostering agencies

- 8. Assist and encourage rolling out of the Frank Buttle Quality Mark to all registered providers of further and higher education. *DfE/BiS*
- 9. Relevant government departments should discuss with UCAS and Frank Buttle UK the possibility of a comprehensive online database where looked after young people can compare the offer of different institutions for people in their situation. *DfE/BiS*

**Financial support**

- 10. We recommend that a Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) be introduced for looked after children sufficient to ensure that all necessary support in pursuit of educational excellence is available. This will help plug the gap of funding uncertainty and consistency that currently exists, as well as demonstrate a practical acknowledgement of the deeper rooted problems children in care have when accessing education. *DfE*
- 11. The Department for Education should also explore the merits of the Pupil Premium kicking in for looked after children from before the age of 4. *DfE*
- 12. As recommended above the Pupil Premium (and PP+) should be allocated to the VSH to ensure the money is spent smartly and in a coordinated way. The VSH would also be in a strong position to distribute the Pupil Premium in accordance with the PEP process. *DfE*
- 13. The Pupil Premium and PP+ should follow the child. *DfE*
- 14. To ensure all children in and leaving care are aware of and receive any financial support to which they are entitled, the Department for Education should write to each Director of Children's Services and remind them of their obligations. We also recommend that the DfE publish the data on delivery by local authorities in complying with this duty in line with new performance tables. *DfE/LAs*
- 15. Action to taken to clarify the entitlements of young people with respect to the 16 - 19 bursary and the support on offer by individual institutions. *DfE*

**Accountability, oversight and transparency**

- 16. To ensure these responsibilities are understood and elected members can be held properly accountable, elected members should have more direct contact with children in care councils. *LAs*
- 17. Each elected councillor should be encouraged to take an active and personal interest in the educational progress of a child in the care *ADCS/LAs/Local Government*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>of their local authority and where appropriate act as their mentor and point of contact within the Council.</p>   | <p><i>Association/<br/>Conservative<br/>Councillors'<br/>Association/<br/>Association of<br/>Liberal Democrat<br/>Councillors/<br/>Association of<br/>Labour Councillors</i></p> |
| <p>18. All councils need to give consideration to their arrangements for enabling looked after children to meet elected members. A letter to all elected members from the SoS reminding them as corporate parents of the importance of meeting with and listening to children in care and their educational experiences would be worthwhile. Indeed, the Children's Minister has already led by example by holding regular quarterly meetings with groups of children in care and separately with care leavers so he can fully understand the challenges they face at school at in other settings.</p> | <p><i>LAs/DfE</i></p>  |
| <p>19. Children in Care Councils should be made aware of local councillors' overview and scrutiny role so that issues around their education can be fed into policy and decision-making processes and to contribute to service improvements. (CfPS submission)</p>   | <p><i>LAs/A National<br/>Voice/Children's<br/>Rights Director</i></p>  |
| <p>20. It is clear from our evidence that there needs to be a senior individual who has oversight of and responsibility for the educational achievement of looked after children. Increasingly it is the Virtual School Head fulfilling that role.</p>   | <p><i>DfE/LAs</i></p>  |
| <p>21. We recommend that the appointment of a senior individual in the form of a Virtual School Head be clarified as a statutory requirement for Local Authorities and that such a person is a nominated officer in terms of the April 2011 regulations and guidance for looked after children and care leavers (reg 10). Extending and strengthening the role of the VSH by making the position statutory will allow the VSH to have real weight within local authorities, hold schools to account and ensure the continuity and quality of learning and support beyond 16.</p>                       | <p><i>DfE</i></p>  |
| <p>22. A Virtual School Head needs to be a senior Local Authority officer, but also they need to have direct access to key senior education and care post holders within the Authority including Directors and Assistant Directors of Children's Services.</p>   | <p><i>LAs</i></p>  |

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>23. To ensure resources are better targeted to address the statutory requirements to improve the educational achievement of looked after children, the Pupil Premium and other grants should be allocated to the Virtual School Head for effective, targeted and traceable distribution together with priority access to a proportion of the Early Intervention Grant. This will also encourage some degree of evaluation of the impact of this development.</p> | <p><i>LAs</i></p>                                  |
| <p>24. All schools should have a governor nominated for children in care, including a remit to promote their educational excellence.</p>  | <p><i>Schools</i></p>                              |
| <p>25. Efforts should be made to identify and encourage more people with experience of care to become school governors.</p>   | <p><i>School governor associations/schools</i></p> |
| <p>26. School governors should work closely with the VSH and be open to challenge from them on their policies in operation in their school to promote the education of children in care.</p>  | <p><i>LAs (VSH)/schools</i></p>                    |
| <p>27. Although it is important that the decision to exclude should be the preserve of the head teacher, it should be good practice for the VSH to be included in the decision-making process.</p>  | <p><i>VSH/schools</i></p>                          |
| <p>28. Although children in care are registered to a particular Virtual School where one exists, academies and free schools should be actively encouraged to work closely with VSHs, to ensure that looked after children are receiving the best and most appropriate support available when attending an academy or free school.</p>   | <p><i>LAs (VSH)/DfE</i></p>                        |
| <p>29. A detailed analysis of the residential school setting estate should be carried out in order to verify the current offer to children in care across the country, to establish the social and educational impact such settings are making to overall outcomes and to explore how such settings could be better utilized in the future.</p>   | <p><i>LAs/DfE</i></p>                              |
| <p>30. We echo the recommendation of the then Children Schools and Families Select Committee in their 2008 report that the role of Independent Reviewing Officer in holding the local authority to account, especially on issues surrounding looked after children's education, would be significantly strengthened and would command much greater confidence amongst children and carers were it to be made truly independent of the local authority</p>           | <p><i>DfE</i></p>                                  |
| <p>31. Ofsted should keep looked after children as a distinct group for inspection purposes rather than as part of the 'all vulnerable people' group so that their progress and the impact of specific</p>  | <p><i>Ofsted</i></p>                               |

- interventions, support and initiatives on their outcomes, educational and otherwise, can be better tracked.
32. As part of their evaluation schedule, Ofsted should inspect the Pupil Premium (including the PP+), how it is spent, and the impact it is having on educational outcomes. *Ofsted*
33. Virtual School Heads should retain responsibility for care leavers from the age of 0-25. *LAs/VHSs*
34. Virtual School Heads should sit on Local Safeguarding Children's Boards. *LAs*
35. Assess what further data capture will aid policy making and monitoring of the impact of policy on the educational outcomes of looked after young people, including at what age the monitoring of outcomes should cease. *LAs/DfE*
36. Request that Ofsted produce a themed report on good practice in supporting educational attainment for looked after children and young people. *DfE*
- Planning and pathways**
37. PEPs should be reviewed each term rather than biannually to match the school planning structure. This does not affect statutory timescales. *LAs/schools*
38. PEPs shouldn't be restricted to the period of compulsory education and should transcend a child's time in care. The 0-25 model adopted by Hackney should be the norm. *LAs*
39. The size of PEPs also needs cutting down to help improve portability. Although a 'national PEP' has its advantages and attractions, it could also stifle the close tracking of individual and personal progress. A basic model template (electronic if possible, an ePEP) could provide consistency and portability without preventing personalisation. *LAs*
40. Attendance at a Personal Education Plan review must include the school and carers. *LAs*
41. The social worker must attend the initial Personal Education Plan but it may well be more appropriate for a lead professional to attend the Personal Education Plan meeting in lieu of a social worker. *LAs*
42. Other relevant professionals should be invited to a Personal Education Plan meeting provided that they are able to make a significant contribution to the plan. *LAs*
43. Children and Young People must have a say in the planning for *LAs*

their education, but it needn't be obligatory for them to attend the formal PEP meeting.

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| 44.  | OFSTED should consider the unannounced inspection of PEP files.  | <i>Ofsted</i>  |
| 45.  | The PEP, although part of the care plan, should always be regarded as a core document in its own right within any care proceedings and be submitted as part of the original application.   | <i>LAs</i>   |
| 46.  | Carers should be more actively encouraged to have greater involvement in the development and implementation of a PEP as well as in the identifying of the right support and interventions for the child in their care.   | <i>LAs/IFAs</i>                                      |
| 47.  | Local authorities should provide more help to carers to enable them to communicate more effectively with schools, for example by arranging dedicated early evening sessions for foster carers to meet key school staff at the earliest opportunity.  | <i>LAs</i>   |
| <b>Carers, professionals and schooling</b> |  |  |
| 48.  | Stronger emphasis on the requirement that the person designated is a qualified teacher.  | <i>DfE</i>   |
| 49.  | The designated teacher must be a member of the teaching staff with appropriate seniority, professional experience and status to provide leadership, training, information and advice to others that will influence decisions about the teaching and learning needs of looked after children. | <i>Schools</i>                                       |
| 50.  | The head of a school may not always be the best person to act as the designated teacher in terms of always being able to provide advocacy for Looked After Children.   | <i>Schools</i>                                       |
| 51.  | There may be a benefit in a formal consideration of having all designated teachers in a Local Authority as associate members of the Virtual School.  | <i>LAs (VSH)/<br/>schools</i>                        |
| 52.  | Mechanisms need to be put in place to make sure that the designated teachers attend training to keep them up to date with recent developments.   | <i>VSHs/schools</i>                                  |
| 53.  | Recruitment training for foster carers - strengthening of the component on supporting education. Training for foster carers and children's home staff should include how to make education the high priority it needs to be.   | <i>LAs/fostering/<br/>children's homes<br/>staff</i> |
| 54.  | More educational opportunities should be made available to foster carers, including the potential for them to study a foundation degree.   | <i>LAs/IFAs</i>                                      |

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 55. Workforce development in relation to foster care should be included in the DfE Business Plan.  | <i>DfE</i>   |
| 56. Greater and more regular formal and informal training needs to be provided for all those involved with children in care, including early years staff, schools (including designated teachers) and corporate parents, on how best to identify and manage issues such as trauma, attachment, emotional development and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. | <i>LAs/IFAs/<br/>children's homes<br/>staff/health<br/>professionals</i> |
| 57. The implementation of new fostering regulations designed to ensure foster parents are able to play the role of any parent looking after his or her own children, including in respect of their education, needs evaluating to ensure consistency across the country.   | <i>LAs/fostering<br/>services (DfE<br/>interest)</i>                     |
| 58. Commission a study into the current level of designated teacher support in post-16 education and consider the introduction of extending the statutory requirement to appoint a designated individual to the post-16 education sector. This should also examine the level of seniority required for this position to be effective.                      | <i>DfE/BiS</i>   |
| 59. Greater weight should be placed on education in initial social worker training.  | <i>Social worker<br/>training providers</i>                              |
| 60. CPD for social workers should include updated training on the educational development of young people from a care background and periodic review of the education system and options available to young people (as those options change).  | <i>LAs</i>   |
| 61. Promote the idea of a Designated Member of Staff in further and higher education as best practice.   | <i>DfE/LAs/Buttle<br/>UK</i>   |
| 62. Training should be provided for all Next Steps personal advisors so that they understand the needs of care leavers and the support and funding structures that are in place for them.  | <i>LAs</i>   |
| 63. Look at Local Authorities such as Norfolk and explore the boarding route as a viable alternative educational setting that can provide both stability and educational success for looked after children.  | <i>LAs</i>   |
| 64. The Department for Education should consider different financial models such as Social Impact Bonds that may help incentivise and encourage local authorities and others to actively pursue the merits of boarding as a potential best option.   | <i>DfE</i>   |
| 65. A full and proper evaluation of the social pedagogy model within the UK should be carried out with a view to establishing its ability to integrate front-line delivery of care and education and to im-  | <i>DfE</i>   |

prove educational outcomes for children in care.

66. We welcome the inclusion of adopted children as ‘high priority’ cases for admissions. *DfE*

**Mentoring and aspiration**

67. Learning mentors should form part of the Virtual School model at every stage of the child's education and development. *LAs*
68. There should be a recruitment drive to encourage older care leavers who have been through the education system to take on mentoring roles (as done so successfully by Tim Clare in Leicester) and to support and develop a care leavers mentor pool. *LAs*
69. There should be a campaign to recruit university students as mentors and role models to looked after children in secondary education. *BiS*
70. Raise awareness and promote early outreach and aspiration by increasing activities such as university visits and taster sessions. *LAs in partnership with Buttle and HEIs*
71. Build on the government announcement of 80,000 work experience places to actively encourage private sector employers to offer at least one work experience opportunity to a care leaver each year. *BiS*
72. Build on the work of the From Care2Work programme in conjunction with the National Apprenticeship Scheme to incentivise more businesses to offer apprenticeships to care leavers. *DfE/BiS*

**Encouraging and facilitating learning**

73. Children in care must be able to access 1:1 tuition (or smaller group tuition) where necessary. The pupil premium (and any Pupil Premium Plus discussed later) offers a financial source for such work. *LAs/schools*
74. More support should be given to providing key learning resources for foster homes eg Letterbox scheme, Fostering Achievement initiative run by the Fostering Network. *LAs/fostering services*
75. Where at all possible children in care should be given the opportunity to experience learning and other life skills outside of the classroom to help increase their educational attainment and self resilience. *Foster carers led by LAs and fostering services*
76. The Department for Education to commission a study into the current provision of educational support services for looked after *DfE*



children with complex learning and behavioural needs both inside and outside the classroom with a view to identifying deficiencies to address and best practice to follow.

77. There should be a drive to recruit looked after children into the Gifted and Talented programme with designated teachers, carers and social workers helping VSHs nominate children they determine display the potential and/or meet the criteria. *LAs*
78. There should be an annual national awards event supported by the Department for Education and with celebrities with a background in care encouraged to get involved as mentors and supporters of the awards. *DfE*
79. Annual awards ceremonies celebrating the achievement of looked after children's academic success should, if not already, be the norm. *LAs*
80. Promote the use of peer mentors in local authorities and the use of 'home grown talent' as utilised by Leicester City Council. *LAs*
81. Review of section 106 of the Education Act 2005 and section 50 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to ensure the envisaged practical effect is working as intended *DfE*
82. We would encourage the Government to look closely at how the educational needs of adopted children can as a consequence be better and earlier assessed so as to provide them with the right support, educational and otherwise. *DfE*

**Health and well being**

83. Demos recommended that the DfE makes mental health assessments of children entering care mandatory, using a standardised multi-disciplinary measure. *(p29 of Demos report)* *DoH*
84. We support that recommendation. Initial assessments of looked after children should be improved to better identify their mental health needs and, with input from educational psychologists, establish the impact those needs may be having on each child's education. *DoH*
85. We agree with and repeat the recommendation of the Children Schools and Families Select Committee in their report of Session 2008-9 entitled 'Looked-after Children' in that children in care should have guaranteed and prioritised access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. *DoH*

**Managing transitions**

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| 86. Consideration given to the suggested re-wording of the Admissions Code designed to overcome the difficulties experienced by looked after children moving schools outside the normal transition periods. | <i>DfE</i> |
| 87. Work should be undertaken to establish at what point a young person should move on to a new social worker and which advocate is the most appropriate 'central source' of advice and guidance.           | <i>LAs</i> |
| 88. There should be mandatory Pathway Planning at transition stage from statutory to post-compulsory education where the 'outgoing' and 'incoming' educational advocates are equally involved.              | <i>LAs</i> |
| 89. Any change of social worker should be in line with the academic year, not by birthday.  | <i>LAs</i> |
| 90. Roll out the 'Staying Put' scheme which helps looked after young people to remain in previously stable fostering placements until they are 21.  | <i>LAs</i> |

## Conclusion

Children don't get to choose their childhood. For children in care that can, and often does, have devastating consequences that affect them for the rest of their lives. Along with their emotional and mental stability, their educational achievement suffers directly as a result.

However and wherever they end up in care and at whatever age, it is incumbent on us all to provide every single looked after child with the educational tools they need to reach their true potential. Anything less and we have failed the benchmark we quite rightly have set both of ourselves and of society.

This report is intended as a sober and realistic reflection on the progress or otherwise that has been made in overcoming the barriers that still remain to children in care attaining the highest level of education they are capable of.

We make no bones of the fact that, on their own, the recommendations we make will not, even if successfully implemented, bridge the entire attainment gap. Indeed, given the woeful start many children in care have had in life, it may never be possible to completely eradicate the educational divide that persists.

What we believe they will do, however, is help create the stability, durability, focus and understanding necessary for looked after children to thrive by way of their education rather than merely survive the ordeal.

Some of these recommendations require legislation, some require a financial commitment over and above that already made, but far more can be put into practice simply by changing our approach to, and recalibrating our priorities towards, the education of looked after children.

The good news is that there are no shortages of people, including those with experience of care themselves, who are determined to make education matter for all children in care. The spreading of that relentless focus to all parts of the care system and beyond will help provide every looked after child with the education they deserve.

# Appendices

## **Appendix 1: Terms of reference—inquiry into the educational outcomes of young people in care/from a care background**

### **Call for written submissions**

Edward Timpson MP and Lord Listowel will be chairing a cross-party inquiry into the educational outcomes of young people from a care background. The inquiry will be independent from the Education Select Committee and government departments; its aim is to examine the current system and make recommendations that could lead to better educational outcomes for children in care.

In 2009 there were almost 61,000 young people in care in England. Studies show that young people in care do not have different aspirations than those from other families – they want a good home, a job and to be financially secure – yet young people in care are much more likely to underachieve (compared to the national average) at school.

Children in care achieve at lower levels than their peers from Key Stage 1 through to the numbers who go on to higher education; they are much less likely than their peers to have at least one GCSE; are significantly less likely to have five A\*-C grades at GCSE and less likely to actually sit GCSE exams. Care leavers aged 19 are almost twice as likely to be ‘not in employment, education and training’ (NEET) as their peers and young people in care/care leavers are overrepresented when it comes to homelessness, teenage pregnancy, special educational needs, substance abuse and the prison population.

Education is a key factor in decreasing poverty, increasing life chances and creating healthier, wealthier, more active members of society. This inquiry will focus specifically on barriers to learning and educational attainment for young people from a care background; input is particularly encouraged from those who have ‘hands on’ experience.

Written evidence is requested on the following areas:

- Why do young people in care achieve at lower levels than their peers?
- What factors have the greatest impact on the educational attainment of children in care?
- How does the ‘on the ground’ experience of current policy correlate to the intentions of current/previous policy?
- Why is there such regional disparity in rates of care leavers who enter education, employment or training at the age of 19?
- What examples of best practice should be highlighted either here or abroad?
- Are there ‘common sense’, practical measures that could easily be changed to improve the current system and its outcomes?
- Is the correct level and type of support available in schools for young people in care?
- What extra support can be put in place to encourage/enable attainment for looked after children?
- What action needs to be taken to ensure more young people from care go on to acquire higher level education and skills?

**Appendix 2: List of respondents**

<b>Written evidence</b>	<p>Local Government Information Unit</p> <p>AimHigher Kent and Medway</p> <p>Adoption UK</p> <p>Ofsted</p> <p>David Berridge <i>University of Bristol</i></p> <p>Frank Buttle Trust</p> <p>Barnardos</p> <p>British Association of Social Workers</p> <p>C4EO</p> <p>NCB</p> <p>The Network</p> <p>Francine Garnier <i>Support and Advisory Teacher for LAC for Calderdale Council (West Yorkshire)</i></p> <p><i>The Centre for Public Scrutiny</i></p> <p><i>Care Leavers Association</i></p> <p>Liz Hunter <i>Virtual Head, Gateshead</i></p> <p>Councillor Joanne Welch <i>Parliamentary Adviser, Royal National Children's Foundation</i></p>	<p>Catch 22</p> <p>Centre for Public Scrutiny</p> <p>Ian Suatt <i>Education Coordinator and YOT Teacher, London Borough of Tower Hamlets and City of London Youth Offending Team</i></p> <p>Rose Griffiths <i>Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Leicester</i></p> <p>Sarah Cullen <i>Widening Participation Manager/Care Leavers coordinator, University of Brighton</i></p> <p>Prison educator <i>Evidence to be anonymous</i></p> <p>UCU Prison Educators <i>To be kept anonymous</i></p> <p>Care Leaver's Association <i>(including case studies)</i></p> <p>Tim Clare <i>Project Workers Leicester City Council</i></p> <p>The Letterbox Club</p>
<b>Oral evidence</b>	<p>Professor Sonia Jackson</p> <p>Professor Eileen Munro</p> <p>Angela Cottrell <i>Modus, Bolton</i></p> <p>Eileen Farrell <i>Manchester</i></p> <p>Peter Kelly <i>SWIIS</i></p> <p>George Philipson <i>EDB Manchester</i></p> <p>Yvette Kelley <i>Northumberland</i></p> <p>Julia Edwards <i>Manchester Foster Carer's Association</i></p> <p>Nushra Mansuri <i>BASW Professional Officer</i></p> <p>Sue Kent <i>BASW Professional Officer</i></p> <p>Sarah Smith <i>BASW Children &amp; Families ctee</i></p> <p>Dr Liz Hunter <i>Virtual School Head, Gateshead</i></p> <p>Patrick Finnegan <i>Virtual School Head, Dudley</i></p> <p>Brian Roberts <i>Head of Learning &amp; Opportunity for Children in care, Peterborough City Council</i></p> <p>Terry Cook <i>Virtual School Head, Norfolk</i></p>	<p>Andrea Warman <i>Works in fostering education, provides foster carers training</i></p> <p>Janice Campbell <i>Foster carer who has been involved with paired reading</i></p> <p>Jill Ward <i>Lifelong Learning Network</i></p> <p>Jo Walden <i>Director of Staffordshire and Shropshire, Chair of National Directors' group</i></p> <p>Graham Hall <i>Runs a mentoring programme with young people in university who were looked-after</i></p> <p>Kreusna Ung <i>Development Worker, Lambeth's Corporate Parenting Team</i></p> <p>Kory James Aaron <i>Glory</i></p> <p>Bart Gumbrell <i>Project Manager, Barnardo's fostering</i></p> <p>Peter McKinney <i>Operational Manager, Barnardo's fostering</i></p>

<b>Oral evidence</b> <i>(continued)</i>	Justin Peck <i>Young person</i>	Steve Furness <i>Aimhigher South West</i>
	Paul Hatcher <i>Carer</i>	Deirdre Lynskey <i>Aimhigher Greater Merseyside</i>
	Joe Baden <i>Open Book Project</i>	Sarah Hurrell <i>Aimhigher Kent and Medway</i>
	John D'White <i>Dawley Centre, Ealing</i>	John Salt <i>Aimhigher</i>
	Jason Grant <i>Open Book Project</i>	Dr John Sanders <i>Assistant Director, Aimhigher Greater Manchester</i>
	John Dwyer <i>Roehampton University</i>	Care Leavers' Association
	Sundeeep Gill <i>LAC Post Teacher/Caseworker, London Borough of Ealing</i>	Tim Clare <i>Project Worker T Leicester City Council (and care leaver)</i>
	George Goldsmiths <i>University (through Open Book)</i>	Brian Bhamra <i>Fostered young person, involved with CiC</i>
	Neville Thomson <i>Goldsmiths</i>	Emma Sawyer <i>Fostered young person</i>
	Roger Adrien <i>Aimhigher Support and Liaison Officer</i>	NW Virtual School Network
	Philip Dent <i>Aimhigher Coventry and Warwickshire</i>	Frank Field <i>MP</i>
<b>Visits</b>	Horizon's Centre <i>Ealing</i>	Hackney Children and Family Services