

Looked after children & young people: working together to improve outcomes



The Scottish
Government

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE: WORKING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

This advice leaflet is for teachers and other professionals concerned with the educational development of pupils who are looked after by local authorities in Scotland. The Scottish Government report *Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better* (2007) explains the broader context in detail and outlines the commitment to improving outcomes for all looked after children and young people. In particular, the report highlights the importance of raising awareness of the educational needs of looked after children and young people among lead professionals. This leaflet has been prepared in response to that need, and is designed to be used as background information for individual professionals or in support of training events.

Who are looked after children and young people?

Children can become looked after for a variety of reasons. Although individual experiences vary, as a group looked after children and young people are among the most socially disadvantaged. The term looked after is legally defined in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Put in everyday language, a child or young person can be looked after at *home* while staying with their family; and *away from home*

in a foster family setting, kinship placement, residential children's unit, residential school, or secure unit. Just over half of all looked after children are supported while continuing to live at home and these young people have the lowest attainment, yet they have often received the least attention from education services.

Local authorities have legal duties to ensure that looked after children and young people have

the same access to educational opportunities as other pupils. These duties, commonly called 'corporate parent' responsibilities, will often mean making additional arrangements in order to support learning, overcome disadvantage and to encourage participation in education in the broadest sense.

How do 'corporate parent' responsibilities affect schools?

These responsibilities are shared by all relevant departments and professionals within a local authority, and are not solely for social work services. This means that schools have duties to know which pupils are looked after and actively to collaborate with carers, social workers, educational psychologists, reporters to the children's panel and specialist medical professionals. Accepting these responsibilities means meeting looked after children's needs in the same way as for other pupils by fostering their wellbeing, encouraging positive behaviour, and assisting them in achieving their full potential from the learning opportunities available.

However, research indicates that looked after children and young people have a high risk of being bullied, falling behind in schooling, being excluded from school (including exclusions which do not conform to official guidelines) and leaving school with few qualifications or even none. They are also much less likely than other young people to progress into further and higher education.

All schools (early education centres, primary, secondary and special schools) must appoint a 'designated senior manager' who has special responsibility for looked after pupils. The Government has set out core tasks in relation to the designated senior manager role. These tasks include liaising with other agencies involved with the child or young person, deciding which information should be shared with school colleagues, advocating on behalf of the child or young person and ensuring that a support plan is in place.



How can teachers help?

Research conducted in Scotland with adults who were looked after as children and who had made successful lives, concluded that the following five factors are important for creating the conditions for success:

- Having people in your life who care about you;
- Experiencing stability;
- Being given high expectations;
- Receiving encouragement and support;
- Being able to participate and achieve.

Teachers have unique opportunities to help looked after children and young people to develop positive relationships with adults, to feel safe and encouraged, and to achieve. A child or young person may perform well in school, even when other aspects of life are disrupted.

However, a child or young person who is looked after will often have been unsettled for some time and have had gaps in education, leading to difficulties in keeping up with school work. Expressions of anger, disappointment and frustration may be evident and behaviour may be inappropriate or even challenging. It is important for a teacher not to regard such behaviour as directed personally, even where it appears so. Teachers can help by trying to defuse conflict, by collaborating with carers and psychologists in a behaviour management plan and by remaining positive in their relations with children and young people. Support for teachers should be available from colleagues, support for learning and pastoral care specialists, and particularly from the designated senior manager. Many local authorities have a specialist looked after children education team to support young people and their carers and teachers.

Looked after children and young people who require additional help to address problems in behaviour or delays in educational progress may receive small group support within the school, or a support for learning specialist or learning assistant may work alongside the class teacher. Young people may have low expectations of themselves in terms of attainment. Teachers should be understanding and supportive, but also encouraging and try to guard against having low expectations.

Pupils who are looked after may travel long distances to and from school because of their placement location. It is preferable to maintain stability in schooling, even where the care placement has to change. Where a looked after pupil misses school for a period of time, because of physical illness or emotional ill health, or due to exclusion, there is an additional responsibility to collaborate with parents or carers to indicate school work which can be undertaken at home. To be successful, this may require a teacher to provide particular

advice for the parent or carer, or to collaborate with a home-school link teacher or support worker.

Teachers have a crucial role to play, in collaboration with families and other professionals, in helping to improve the life chances of looked after children in our community.

Sources of further information

More information can be found on the Looked after Children website at: www.ltscotland.org.uk/lookedafterchildren

Scottish Government report, *Looked After Children & Young People: We can and must do better* www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/01/15084446

These Are our Bairns: A guide for community planning partnerships or being a good corporate parent www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/08/29115839/0

Core tasks for Designated Managers in educational and residential establishments in Scotland www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/09/09143710/0

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