

LEARNING WITH CARE

The Education of Children Looked After Away from Home by Local Authorities

Report of an inspection undertaken jointly by

**HM Inspectors of Schools and the Social Work Services Inspectorate
March 2001**

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Foreword

In a speech to the Association of Directors of Social Work on 24 March 1999, the Minister for Education, Helen Liddell, announced a joint task between HM Inspectors of Schools (HMI) and the Social Work Services Inspectorate (SWSI) to investigate the education of children being looked after by local authorities. This report describes the findings of the subsequent joint inspection, the first of its type, which was carried out in 1999-2000. It makes a number of recommendations to improve the education of children looked after away from home by local authorities.

Evidence from this report, as well as from research, indicates clearly that children looked after away from home are at a particular educational disadvantage. In comparison with their peers they tend to be behind in their attainments, leave school with fewer qualifications and are more at risk of being excluded from school.

If children are removed from their own homes, there is a duty¹ to ensure that the care provided should be better than that which they were previously receiving. As stated in national guidance², they should "... where necessary, receive additional help, encouragement and support to address special needs or compensate for previous deprivation and disadvantage". Education has the potential to provide all looked after children with an opportunity to improve their life chances and to help them participate fully in society.

It is clear from this report that the education of looked after children is not as good as it should be. In particular, the inspection highlighted too many instances where local authorities have failed to carry out their duties to ensure that all children looked after away from home have care plans and placement agreements as specified in the legislation. Effective implementation of the legislation will help to improve the joint working between education and social work services that is crucial to meeting the educational needs of these children.

This report acknowledges the positive steps being taken by some local authorities to support and promote the education of looked after children. Nevertheless, considerable improvements still need to be made before all looked after children receive the quality of education they have a right to expect. The report identifies where these improvements are required. We hope that it will heighten awareness of the needs of looked after children and will assist those working with them to rise to the challenge of providing them with the best possible educational future.

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A SKINNER
Chief Inspector of Social Work

¹ Section 16 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995-"the no order principle".

² Scotland's Children: The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance

Chapter 1: Executive summary

1.1 This report describes the results of a joint inspection undertaken by HMI and SWSI in 1999-2000. The inspection was announced in March 1999 by Helen Liddell, the Minister for Education, as the first joint inspection of its type. The aim of the inspection was to evaluate the social work and educational services provided by local authorities to meet the educational needs of looked after children³ living away from home continuously, either in residential units which do not provide education on the premises, or in family placements. This executive summary outlines the main points arising from each chapter. The 9 main recommendations made in the report are highlighted with paragraph references indicating where they are discussed in the main text.

Chapter 2: Introduction

1.2 Key legislation relating to looked after children includes the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, and the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000. In particular, guidance to the 1995 Act states that "Children who are looked after should have the same educational opportunities as all other children for education, including further and higher education, and access to other opportunities for development."

1.3 The latest available figures indicate that in March 1999 there were 11,191 children looked after by local authorities in Scotland. Of these, 53% were looked after away from their own homes, with more than half living with foster carers.

1.4 Research indicates that children looked after away from home are at a particular educational disadvantage. In comparison with their peers they tend to be behind in their attainments, leave school with fewer qualifications and be more at risk of being excluded from school. The inspection sought to consider how a small sample of looked after children was faring educationally and what needed to be done to bring about improvements.

1.5 The inspection focused on a sample of 50 children at the later stages of primary school and at the Standard and Higher Grade stages of secondary school because these are crucial educational periods where stability of schooling is likely to be particularly important.

1.6 The provision in 5 local authorities was selected for inspection. These were Aberdeen City Council, South Lanarkshire Council, Stirling Council, The Highland Council and West Dunbartonshire Council. These authorities represent a variety in terms of rural, urban and mixed settings, and in terms of the numbers of looked after children. Education and social work senior managers, with responsibility for looked after children, were interviewed in all 5 authorities. The Reporter in each authority was interviewed. Two Children's Panel Chairs were also interviewed. The education and social work files of 10 looked after children in each of these authorities were

³ For ease of expression, the term "children" as used in this report applies to those in the age range from birth to 18 years. Where it is clear from the context that reference is being made only to those children of secondary school age then the term young people is used.

examined and their social worker and key teachers were interviewed. Where there was contact with parents, they were sent a brief questionnaire. At least 5 children in each authority, and their carers, were selected for individual interview. Although the intention was to interview 25 children, a number declined to be interviewed. Ultimately, 21 children were interviewed.

1.7 In addition, all local authority education departments and social work services in Scotland were sent a brief questionnaire requesting information about current initiatives in the education of looked after children. Children's Services Plans from each local authority were scrutinised and reviews of these plans were examined where available.

Chapter 3: Assessment, care planning and review

1.8 It was unusual for any form of assessment to have been carried out on the 50 sample children at the time they became looked after. It was even more unusual to find an assessment which addressed educational needs. Where educational progress was described it was often inaccurate.

Main recommendation 1

Local authorities should carry out a full, multi-disciplinary assessment involving education and social work personnel, and others as appropriate around the time a child becomes looked after. This assessment should provide a baseline for future educational progress. Points for action should be identified in the care plan and placement agreement. (3.2-3.5)

1.9 Although care plans have been a statutory requirement since 1997, they were in place for only a minority of children in 2 of the authorities inspected. They were in place for most children in the other 3 authorities. Where there were care plans they did not usually address educational needs and goals in any detail, and schools were not normally supplied with a copy of the care plan. Under normal circumstances, schools should receive a copy. Statutory placement agreements were little in evidence. Almost all of those which were in place were within one authority.

Main recommendation 2

Local authorities should implement quality assurance procedures to ensure that statutory requirements are met effectively. Local authorities should ensure that all looked after children have care plans and placement agreements as specified in the legislation. (3.6-3.8, 9.18)

1.10 Almost all of the cases in the 5 authorities were reviewed regularly and within statutory time limits. However, only one authority routinely requested a written report from the child's school and only one had a policy on teacher attendance at review meetings. The Scottish Executive should work with local authorities to add an education pro-forma to the Looked After Children review of the care plan folder. Access to confidential information was generally handled well by schools although breaches of confidentiality were noted in 3 cases out of the 50 cases examined.

Education departments and social work services should ensure that they have effective arrangements for sharing and using confidential information.

Chapter 4: Attendance arrangements

1.11 In all 5 authorities, good arrangements were in place for looked after children to attend school. Children usually continued to attend their current school when they became looked after, where this was in their best interests. Local authorities should ensure that they have policies for the school transport of looked after children which cover funding and safety requirements, including Scottish Criminal Records Office checks on drivers and escorts.

1.12 Two young people were not attending school at the time of the inspection and one was admitted to residential school during the inspection, following a period of non-attendance. Looked after children account for 13% of all exclusions although they represent only 1% of the school population. In the sample of 50 children, 21 had been excluded from school at least once. Local authorities should monitor progress against set targets for the reduction of exclusions among looked after children. They should also ensure that looked after children are advised of their rights of appeal against exclusion from school and are supported appropriately to appeal, if they wish to do so.

Main recommendation 3

Except in exceptional circumstances, all looked after children should have permanent full-time education, however that may be organised. (4.7-4.8)

Chapter 5: Progress, attainment and support for learning

1.13 An analysis of children's attainments confirmed the research results that most were underachieving in comparison with their peers. In relation to attainment in English language and mathematics, the majority of children in the sample were underachieving in terms of 5-14 targets. Of the pupils at the primary stages, just under half were achieving the expected targets, about one fifth were achieving targets one level below that expected for their age, and about one third were achieving 2 levels or more below that expected for their age. Only 8 out of 25 young people obtained the national average of 7 Standard Grade awards. Only 2 young people achieved the national average of 3 awards at Credit level.

Main recommendation 4

Schools should take particular care to identify the learning needs of all their looked after children, set them challenging but realistic educational targets and systematically monitor the progress made. A senior member of staff in each school should maintain an overview of looked after children's progress and take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate measures are in place for supporting the children's education. (5.4-5.5, 9.19)

1.14 About half of the 50 children in the sample were receiving, or had received, additional assistance in the form of learning or behaviour support. In general, the support was appropriate across all 5 authorities.

Chapter 6: Personal and social development

1.15 Personal and social development is a core aspect of education. It is concerned with the development of those personal qualities which enable a child to make relationships, become independent and operate effectively in society. Most of the looked after children had personal or emotional problems, to varying degrees, arising from their life experiences. The ethos and pastoral care in the schools were generally positive, supportive and caring. There were good examples of children being praised and having their self-esteem enhanced. Primary schools, in particular, were good at celebrating success and many children in the sample had gained certificates for achievements of various kinds. Some pupils were making good progress in their personal and social development, but overall, progress was very variable.

1.16 Children had good access to extra-curricular activities which, in the main, were well funded by most social work services. Schools generally provided good opportunities to participate in school trips both within the UK and abroad. Children in primary schools were more likely to be involved in extra-curricular activities than those at secondary. Carers offered a variety of activities for the children, including athletics, horse riding, swimming, Brownies and Guides.

1.17 While most young people had good access to appropriate curricular and vocational guidance, a small but significant minority failed to access appropriate advice. When looked after young people are having their care plans reviewed, local authorities should ensure that effective arrangements are in place for them to receive appropriate curricular and vocational guidance.

Chapter 7: Working in partnership

1.18 The working relationships between school staff and carers were generally positive and strong. Schools treated carers as if they were parents for all school-related purposes. Schools generally spoke very highly of the support they received from carers and vice versa, although a few residential units were commented on less favourably.

1.19 Partnerships between social workers and school staff were of mixed quality although, encouragingly, both considered that partnerships had improved over recent years. As might be expected, working relationships were generally best where there was regular contact between school staff and social workers. Generally, social workers were not knowledgeable about the attainment of their children and often appeared not to understand the system of attainment levels in the 5-14 curriculum or courses leading to Scottish Qualifications Authority awards.

Main recommendation 5

Local authorities should develop an integrated policy covering education and social work which ensures that the educational needs of looked after children are met

effectively. They should also provide joint professional development for education and social work staff, and carers, to ensure that they are able to contribute effectively towards the implementation of the policy. (7.6, 8.5, 9.6, 9.10)

1.20 Social workers were generally very positive about the parental role carers maintained with schools. Many social workers indicated that they had delegated the school contact role partly or entirely to the carers, although such delegation and its limitations were not always stated explicitly. There was a minority of carers, particularly relative carers, who required more social work support to play a parental role with the school.

1.21 Parents retained parental responsibilities for the vast majority of children in the sample. However, many school staff were uncertain about how to involve parents in their child's education. They were unaware that where parents retained legal rights, consent forms for outings and immunisations required to be signed by parents. Parents did not always receive copies of school reports.

Main recommendation 6

Unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary, parents having contact with their children should receive regular information about their children's progress in school, including end-of-session reports. (7.11)

1.22 Reporters and Children's Panel Chairs mainly spoke favourably about foster carers and the educational support which they provided. The level of attendance of teachers at Children's Hearings varied from about 90% in one authority to under 50% in another. Where a teacher was not in attendance Reporters and Panel members may not have had enough knowledge about the curriculum to know whether or not the child's attainment was a cause for concern. Reporters and Panel members should have good opportunities to learn about developments in education, particularly in the curriculum.

Chapter 8: Carers' support for learning

1.23 Without exception, foster carers tried to provide the children with a positive environment for learning. However, the majority had no personal experience of further or higher education and were often unsure how to help the children with their studies. The support that foster carers and relative carers need to provide an educationally rich environment should be assessed as part of the carer approval process. When necessary, carers should be provided with appropriate educational resources, training and advice (see main recommendation 5).

1.24 One authority, which had a high percentage of its looked after children in residential care, had made considerable and fruitful efforts to make their residential units educationally rich environments. By contrast, some units in other authorities were providing educationally poor environments. For example, in some, where children shared bedrooms, there was insufficient opportunity for them to have the quietness they needed to concentrate on their homework.

Main recommendation 7

As part of their quality assurance procedures local authorities should undertake an audit of their residential units to assess how far they are educationally rich environments and, where shortcomings are found, make plans to take appropriate action. (8.9)

Chapter 9: Policies, management and quality assurance

1.25 Children's Services Plans from all authorities in Scotland were examined. The education of looked after children needed to be considered in more detail in most Plans. Each local authority should develop and implement a comprehensive policy on the education of looked after children and provide joint professional development for education and social work staff, and carers (see main recommendation 5). Appendix 3 of the main report provides a list of issues which such a policy might cover. In consultation with local authorities, the Scottish Executive should develop methods of spreading good practice in the education and care of looked after children.

Main recommendation 8

Local authorities should include explicit and targeted consideration of the education of looked after children in Children's Services Plans and reviews. (9.2-9.3)

1.26 Three of the authorities inspected had separate elected members' committees for education and social work while the remaining 2 had committees covering both the education and social work services for children. Only one authority had combined its education and social work services for children under one overall manager. However, given their recent introduction, it was not possible to evaluate the effects of these different organisational structures on the education of looked after children.

1.27 Most residential and foster carers were confident that their local authority would provide additional funds for such items as books, school trips, equipment or tuition, if required. However social workers, carers and young people themselves were concerned about whether financial assistance would be provided to support young people's participation in further or higher education, beyond their 18th birthday. There should be specific financial arrangements in place to reassure young people that they will be supported to complete their chosen course of study.

1.28 Authorities need to gather better statistics about the education of looked after children; only 4 out of 30 authorities maintained a central register of information.

Main recommendation 9

Local authorities should keep accurate statistics on a range of aspects of the education of looked after children as agreed in the Social Work Information and Review Group document "Local and National Information Requirements for Social Work".⁴ (9.17)

⁴ Social Work Information and Review Group (2000), Local and National Information Requirements for Social Work: Joint Statement August 2000, (CoSLA, ADSW, Accounts Commission, Scottish Executive).

1.29 The significant number of examples where statutory requirements relating to assessments, care plans and placement agreements were not being met, pointed to a need for better quality assurance procedures in local authorities (see main recommendation 2).

1.30 While the majority of headteachers of primary and special schools knew how many looked after children were on their roll, the same was not true of secondary headteachers. A senior member of staff in each school should have responsibility for monitoring the progress and attainment of looked after children and for ensuring that their education is being supported appropriately (see main recommendation 4).

Chapter 2: Introduction

2. Introduction

2.1 Children are looked after by local authorities when they are:

- provided with accommodation under section 25 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995; or
- subject to a supervision requirement made by a Children's Hearing under section 70 of the above Act; or
- subject to an Order, authorisation or warrant according to which they have responsibilities in respect of the child under chapters 2, 3 or 4 of Part II of the above Act; or
- living in Scotland but subject to an equivalent order made in England, Wales or Northern Ireland (section 33 of the above Act).

2.2 Looked after children⁵ may be living in foster homes, with relatives, friends or in other community placements, in residential units or schools, or at home under supervision. This report focuses on the educational experiences of children looked after away from home as there is considerable evidence that these children are educationally disadvantaged in a number of ways.

Legislative background

2.3 The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 is seen by the Government as fulfilling its obligations to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights. It came into force in April 1997 and local authorities have prepared Children's Services Plans as from April 1998. The Act has far-reaching consequences for the planning, structure and quality of services offered to children and for the practices of professionals concerned. The Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Act 2000 states that it is the duty of a council, in the performance of those of its functions which relate principally to children, to have regard to the value of stable family life in a child's development.

2.4 Local authorities have a duty under section 17 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are looked after by the local authority. The Arrangements to Look After Children Regulations 1996, state that each child must have a care plan which addresses the educational needs of the child. In drawing up the care plan the local authority must have regard to the means of meeting any educational needs and the means of achieving continuity in the child's education. Guidance to the 1995 Act states that:

⁵ For ease of expression, the term "children" as used in this report applies to those in the age range from birth to 18 years. Where it is clear from the context that reference is being made only to those children of secondary school age then the term young people is used.

"Children who are looked after should have the same opportunities as all other children for education, including further and higher education, and access to other opportunities for development. They should also, where necessary, receive additional help, encouragement or support to address special needs or compensate for previous deprivation or disadvantage."
(Ref: *The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 Regulations and Guidance, Vol 2, para 61 The Scottish Office (1997)*)

2.5 The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 requires authorities to provide "adequate and efficient education for their area" and this must include provision for special educational needs. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 states that it is the right of every child of school age to be provided with school education. Under section 2 of this Act, a duty is placed on local authorities to provide or secure for every child of school age, "education which is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential."

Statistical background

2.6 In March 1999⁶ there were 11,191 children looked after by local authorities in Scotland. Of these 53% were looked after away from their own homes. The number in foster care was 3,155; the number in residential care, including residential schools, was 1,784; and the number placed with friends, relatives or other community placements was 943. Numbers of children looked after have reduced considerably since March 1983 and March 1993, the respective totals being 15,529 and 12,371. More recently the rate of reduction has slowed and numbers of looked after children rose slightly in 1998-99.

2.7 The number of children where truancy was a primary reason for admission into care was 500 in 1993. This is unlikely to represent the total number for whom educational difficulties were either a primary or secondary reason for admission to care. More recent national data on the reasons why children become looked after are not available. Data on children who become looked after through the Children's Hearing system are now collected by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration.

2.8 The most recent data on exclusion rates for looked after children (Exclusions From Schools 1998/99 SEED, 2000) indicate that although they make up only 1% of the total school population looked after children account for 13% of all exclusions.

Research background

2.9 The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, now the Scottish Executive, and the Social Work Services Group funded a review of the research, policy and practice in respect of the education and care of children looked after away from home. This review was published in 1998⁷ and, with other research, informed the inspection task.

⁶ The figures for March 2000 were not available when this report was written.

⁷ Borland, M, Pearson, C, Hill, M, Tisdall, K and Bloomfield, I (1998) Education and Care Away from Home: A Review of Research, Policy and Practice. Scottish Council for Research in Education, Edinburgh.

2.10 The 1998 review, which ranged widely over research in the UK, made the following important points.

- Most looked after children are below average in their educational attainment and many studies have shown that the majority leave care with no formal qualifications. Part of the reason for this can be attributed to aspects of the interaction between the care and education systems.
- Many looked after children have frequent changes in school and may find themselves in care environments where education is not greatly valued. There can also be a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities among professionals who have responsibility for the children. These factors lessen the impact schools have on the educational progress of looked after children.
- Children themselves complained of being stigmatised because they were being looked after and reported that teachers often have low educational expectations of them.

2.11 However, there are signs that the educational challenges facing looked after children are becoming more fully recognised and that there is a growing awareness at national and local levels that action needs to be taken to improve their educational experience and attainment. Since the above review was published, the Scottish Executive has set a target that all looked after children should achieve, as a minimum, a Standard Grade in both English and mathematics.

The inspection task

2.12 This joint inspection was undertaken by HMI and SWSI in 1999-2000. Its aim was to evaluate the social work and educational services provided by local authorities to meet the educational needs of looked after children living away from home continuously, either in residential units which do not provide education on the premises, or in family placements.

2.13 The provision for children in residential schools, secure care, or in a series of short-term placements for the purposes of respite was not inspected. The task concentrated on:

- the role of the local authority as a corporate parent;
- the interface between schools and placements in the community; and
- children who had been looked after away from home for more than 6 months, as otherwise it would have been difficult to assess the impact of local authority care on their education.

2.14 The inspection targeted children at the later stages of primary school and at the Standard and Higher Grade stages of secondary school. These are crucial educational periods where stability of schooling is likely to be particularly important.

2.15 The following table outlines the inspection procedure. Appendix 1 provides information on the sampling.

Table 1: Summary of inspection procedures

- All local authority education departments and social work services in Scotland were sent a brief questionnaire requesting information about current initiatives in the education of looked after children.
- Children's Services Plans from each local authority were scrutinised and reviews of these plans were examined where available.
- Five local authorities of different sizes were selected for inspection. These were Aberdeen City Council, South Lanarkshire Council, Stirling Council, the Highland Council and West Dunbartonshire Council. These covered urban, rural, and mixed settings and a mixture of both above and below average numbers and percentages of looked after children compared to other authorities in Scotland.
- The education and social work files of 10 looked after children in each of the 5 authorities were examined and their social worker and key teachers were interviewed. Where there was contact with parents, the parents were sent a brief questionnaire.
- At least 5 children in each authority, and their carers, were selected for individual interview.
- Twenty-one of these children were interviewed in their place of residence, and so also were their carers.
- Education and social work senior managers, with responsibility for looked after children, were interviewed in all 5 authorities. The Reporter in each authority was interviewed. Two Children's Panel Chairs were interviewed.

Chapter 3: Assessment, care planning and review

3. Background

3.1 In order for looked after children to gain the maximum benefit from education, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and its associated Regulations and Guidance require that:

- their needs, including their educational needs, should be assessed at the time they start to be looked after away from home;
- a statutory care plan should be drawn up to meet their identified needs;
- the people caring for the child on a day-to-day basis should know clearly their roles and responsibilities for carrying out the care plan;
- the care plan should be reviewed on a regular basis; and
- appropriate records should be maintained and confidentiality respected.

Kenny⁸ (11) was 9 when he started to be looked after. At this time a very detailed and skilled assessment was carried out concerning the relationship between Kenny and his mother, and his aggressive and uncontrolled behaviour towards her. Kenny's mother has both learning and physical disabilities. The assessment was conducted residentially with Kenny and his mother living in an annex of a children's residential unit. The conclusion of the assessment was that it would not be appropriate for Kenny to return home and he has since resided, by choice, in the same residential unit. Kenny's school attainments, attendance and behaviour did not form part of the assessment. His attainments matched those of his peers but his school behaviour was, and still is, very aggressive and disruptive. He has had a number of exclusions and brief periods of truancy.

Evaluation and recommendations

Assessment

3.2 Assessments should aim to provide a clear and full picture of the child's development. The developmental dimensions addressed should include: health, education, family and social relationships, emotional and behavioural development, identity, social presentation and self-care skills. Whilst co-ordination of a multi-disciplinary assessment is likely to be undertaken by the child's social worker, education and health professionals have an essential contribution to make. For many children, allied professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, careers advisers or youth workers may be appropriately involved. If the assessment is undertaken when the child is already looked after, his or her carers⁹ have a crucial contribution to make. The knowledge and views of the child and his or her parents are also central to the assessment.

⁸ Case histories have all been anonymised.

⁹ The generic terms "carers" is used to describe foster carers, residential staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

3.3 It was unusual for any form of assessment to have been carried out on the 50 sample children at the time they became looked after. It was even more unusual to find an assessment which addressed educational needs. Where educational progress was described it was often inaccurate. For example, one child who was well behind expected achievements for her age was described as having "appropriate development and functioning for her age".

3.4 Using a standard proforma¹⁰, an assessment had subsequently been completed on a small number of children, because a permanent family placement was planned. The question on this form which asked about educational attainment had not been completed in a single case nor were school end-of-session reports appended as requested. Only 2 authorities had started to use Looking after Children in Scotland: Good Parenting, Good Outcomes¹¹ (LAC) materials at the time of the inspection. Only one completed Assessment and Action Record was found on the social work files, and in that case the answers to the educational questions were incomplete.

3.5 Schools did not, as a matter of course, conduct assessments on children who became looked after. All schools issued end-of-session reports and conducted assessments for special educational needs. However, these reports did not necessarily coincide with the time the child became looked after, nor were they always supplied to social work services when a child became looked after. Schools could make a greater and more helpful contribution to assessments of looked after children, both by supplying the reports, results and assessments they already undertake, updated as necessary, and by sharing their considerable knowledge of children's educational, physical, emotional and social needs. A full, multi-disciplinary assessment involving education and social work personnel, and others as appropriate, should be carried out around the time a child becomes looked after. This assessment should provide a baseline for future educational progress. Points for action should be identified in the care plan and placement agreement.

Care plans

3.6 Care plans were in place for most or all children in 3 authorities although in one they had all been completed just prior to the inspection. In the other 2 authorities, care plans were in place in only a minority of cases in spite of the fact that one of these authorities had piloted LAC materials. Social workers, in the cases where there was no care plan, said that it was "implicit in the reviews" or "implicit in the case record" or that LAC materials had not yet been implemented. There was a failure to appreciate that care plans have been a legal requirement since 1997. Local authorities should ensure that all looked after children have care plans as specified in the legislation.

3.7 The care plans which were in place varied in quality and comprehensiveness. They did not address educational needs and goals in any detail or, in some cases, at

¹⁰ British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, Form E.

¹¹ The Looking After Children (LAC) materials were developed, originally in England and Wales, to provide a systematic approach to the assessment, care planning and review of looked after children using the 7 dimensions described in 3.2 above. They provide standardised case records which enable social workers and carers to identify actions required to meet children's assessed needs. The materials, now amended for Scottish use, are used, or about to be used, in all authorities in Scotland.

all. The plans recorded on LAC materials were all completed retrospectively due to the length of time the children had been looked after but they did contain some more detail about educational needs and goals. There was no evidence that schools had been consulted about the content of care plans, nor were they supplied with copies. Under normal circumstances schools should receive a copy of the care plan.

Placement agreements

3.8 There is a statutory duty to have a placement agreement for children in foster care, and such agreements are useful for children in residential care. It was unusual to find a placement agreement or a "day-to-day placement arrangements"¹² form. Those that were seen were almost all within one authority which was not yet using the LAC materials. These agreements tended to be reasonably detailed concerning educational arrangements, for example, outlining transport or homework arrangements. However, there was no evidence of direct involvement of schools in drawing them up, although schools may have been consulted. School staff should be involved in a meeting to draw up the educational part of the agreement. Such a meeting, repeated if the child moved placement or school, would bring much greater clarity and mutual understanding. Local authorities should ensure that all looked after children have placement agreements as specified in the legislation.

Reviews of care plans

3.9 Almost all of the cases in the 5 authorities were reviewed regularly and within statutory time limits, once children were in care. Children and their parents were regularly invited to reviews, and most attended. Reviews of the care plan¹³ were a robust aspect of local authorities' child care planning systems and could potentially provide a very beneficial forum for identifying strengths and difficulties, and making plans to support looked after children's education. There were, however, some weaknesses in the review process.

- Discussion of education at reviews of the care plan tended to focus considerably more on behaviour and attendance than on attainment. Looked after children being "settled" was often seen as a sufficient end in itself rather than as a foundation for improving their educational attainment. Social workers' and carers' review reports, and review discussions on children's attainment, tended to be over-optimistic. Where educational difficulties were identified, plans were not always made to alleviate them. Only one authority routinely requested a written report from the school.
- Discussion of education tended to be more detailed and more accurate when a teacher was present but, with the exception of one authority, invitations to teachers to attend reviews of the care plan appeared fairly arbitrary. If invited, teachers were more likely to attend where a child was displaying difficulties in school and many were unsure if they had a role in the review if there were "no

¹² This is the name of the placement agreement in the LAC materials.

¹³ Local authorities are required to review the care plans of looked after children within 6 weeks of their admission into care, 3 months thereafter and then every 6 months. Such reviews are denoted "reviews of the care plan" in this report to distinguish them from other review processes.

problems". On the other hand, the children interviewed were more likely to welcome teachers attending when they felt they would receive positive feedback. Schools were not routinely sent minutes of review meetings, even when a teacher had attended. The authority which had an explicit policy on teacher attendance at reviews had decided that teachers should only attend with the child's agreement and they might only attend for part of the review. Teachers in this authority were invited to attend in slightly over half of the cases.

- A considerable number of children were subject to educational review in school because they had special educational needs. In spite of the fact that these meetings usually involved a social worker and /or a carer, the discussions and decisions were not routinely fed into the review of the care plan.

3.10 It is important that children are consulted about who attends reviews of their care plan. They may not wish a teacher to be present when personal issues are discussed. Nevertheless, the majority of children interviewed accepted or welcomed a trusted teacher attending all or part of the review. Where a child is in agreement, a teacher should be invited to attend at least part of the review meeting, and their contribution could helpfully be supported by a written report from the school. Where it is not in a child's interests for a teacher to attend the review meeting, a report should always be supplied by the school. In addition, for some children, a school based educational review system will already be in place or may be appropriate. Where this is the case, the main findings and the decisions from these reviews should be fed in to review of the care plan meetings. The Scottish Executive should work with local authorities to add an education pro-forma to the LAC review of the care plan folder.

3.11 Where siblings were being looked after there was a tendency in assessments, care plans and reviews of the care plan to conflate the progress and needs of siblings. Discussion could be of the "girls" or "the children" without differentiation and, where a child was placed with a sibling or siblings whose behaviour was much more troublesome, his/her educational progress and needs could be almost wholly overlooked. In one case, a child was being harassed by older siblings because of information about his learning difficulties revealed in joint reviews. Reviews of looked after siblings should usually be held separately. Sometimes there is value in holding them consecutively.

Case recording

3.12 Social work case files and pupil progress records (PPRs) held by schools were examined. The quality of social work records in terms of accuracy, detail, legibility and how up to date they were, varied among authorities. In 3 authorities the quality was mainly acceptable and in one authority mainly good. Contacts with schools were usually recorded. It was not always easy to find which school a child currently attended, the contact people there and their telephone numbers and, if found, the information was sometimes out of date. Most files had little or no information about the schools the child had previously attended or about their educational progress. Most did not contain school reports, although in all cases these were sent to each child's carer. If LAC materials are implemented fully many of these gaps will be remedied.

3.13 PPRs were much briefer and more succinct than social work records. Almost all the PPRs had up to date information on attainment, attendance and behaviour. Most gave no indication of the child's legal status or whether the child had a social worker. Where a social worker was indicated it was often not the current one. PPRs were more likely to record the carers' names and current details. Copies of the statutory notifications under Regulation 7 of The Looked after Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996 were found in PPRs in only one authority. These provided information about changes of legal status and address, and were a very helpful source of information. Some PPRs contained copious records of the children's behaviour, almost all of it negative. In good practice, teachers should seek to identify and record examples of positive as well as negative behaviour. Notes of contacts and meetings with social workers and carers were conspicuous by their absence except where, occasionally, the school received minutes of reviews of the care plan from the social work department. The basic details of the child's legal status and of social work and carer contacts should be recorded on PPRs. These points should be taken into account in any future redesign of the PPR.

Confidentiality

3.14 Confidential information provided by social workers was usually handled well by schools. Most schools differentiated between the kind of information they routinely collected about all children and the more detailed and personal information held on those looked after. The latter was usually shared with teaching staff on a "need to know" basis. Generally, this action was appropriate in that the information concerned only current issues which might have had an impact on the child's behaviour and well-being in school, rather than details of their past history.

Becky (12) had always attended the same primary school. This necessitated a long taxi journey from her foster carers when she became looked after. Becky is self-conscious about her looked after status and was very upset when her teacher mentioned to her class that she was in foster care. She told her social worker about this incident and he raised it with the headteacher, who apologised to Becky. The headteacher has regular discussions with Becky. During one of these, after Becky had been exhibiting some unsettled behaviour, Becky confided that her mother, with whom she had regular contact, had been imprisoned a few days previously. Becky's social worker and carers had not shared this information with school staff. The headteacher subsequently discussed her report, prepared for a review of the care plan, with Becky and also asked her if it was acceptable for her to attend the meeting. Becky decided she did not want her headteacher at the review, in spite of their good relationship, because she was still anxious about the previous breach of confidence.

3.15 Three breaches of confidentiality by teachers were found which were distressing for the children concerned. Two had been taken up with the school by the social workers and /or carer. The third had been dealt with by the young person and her friends who, in her words, had "put the teacher straight". Some social work staff were concerned that information shared with school staff might breach confidentiality for the child. However, a number of examples were found where teachers' knowledge and understanding of factors leading to disruptive, confrontational or withdrawn behaviour had allowed additional support and positive strategies to be put in place. Other situations were found where it would have been helpful for teachers to

have been informed about events outwith school which had led to a deterioration in the child's behaviour. Education departments and social work services should ensure that they have effective arrangements for sharing and using confidential information, and these should be implemented in schools and social work teams.

Main recommendations 1 and 2

Local authorities should carry out a full, multi-disciplinary assessment involving education and social work personnel, and others as appropriate around the time a child becomes looked after. This assessment should provide a baseline for future educational progress. Points for action should be identified in the care plan and placement agreement. (3.2-3.5)

Local authorities should implement quality assurance procedures to ensure that statutory requirements are met effectively. Local authorities should ensure that all looked after children have care plans and placement agreements as specified in the legislation. (3.6-3.8, 9.18)

Chapter 4: Attendance arrangements

4. Background

4.1 In order that looked after children gain maximum benefit from their education it is important that any disruption to their school experience is minimised. Unavoidable disruption should be carefully planned and all relevant information about their previous education, home situation and looked after status should be passed to the receiving school with appropriate sensitivity and confidentiality.

David (10) has been looked after since May 1996 as a result of his mother being unable to cope with his behaviour. David has been living with his foster carers for 3 years. He has attended 3 different primary schools. His mother moved him from his first school as she was concerned about the company he was keeping and also had concerns about bullying. His foster carers, in conjunction with his social worker, have since moved him to a school in their village. This means that David no longer has to travel a distance to school each morning and can form better friendships with children in the village. The move was planned carefully and David is now well settled into school, has a group of friends and his behaviour in school has improved. Although his educational attainments are below average he is now receiving support for his learning and has an individualised educational programme.

Evaluation and recommendations

4.2 In all the authorities inspected, good arrangements were in place for looked after children to attend school. There was a general principle of maintaining children in their current schools when they became looked after, where this was in their best interests. In a few cases, however, social workers felt that they had to press for transport costs to be paid when a substantial period of time was involved. In one authority there was no clear policy covering safety arrangements for the transport of looked after children to and from school. Local authorities should ensure that they have policies for the school transport of looked after children which cover funding and safety requirements, including Scottish Criminal Records Office checks of drivers and escorts.

4.3 Forty eight of the 50 children in the sample were enrolled full-time in a school at the time of the inspection. Two were excluded and were without any alternative educational provision. Most had placements in mainstream schools, although a significant minority were placed in specialist provision (see Appendix 1). In almost all cases, the placements in specialist provision were appropriate for those concerned.

4.4 A number of the children had had their education disrupted. Two in the same local authority had attended 8 different schools before they had become looked after. In most other cases, school moves were either as a result of moving from primary to secondary, from mainstream to specialist provision or, in 2 cases, at the request of parents or foster carers. However, in one local authority a foster carer had moved a child's school placement without consultation with the child's social worker. Although this school move had been for a good reason, and the child was now settled

in the new school, it was inappropriate for this change to have been made without full discussion with all parties concerned. When children did move schools, appropriate procedures were in place for admission to school and for transfer of information and records.

4.5 The 2 inspection visits to each local authority were separated by 10 weeks on average. During these periods, one young person in foster care and 5 children in residential care moved care placement and one young person in residential care returned home. This degree of movement suggests a high level of instability in care placements. Fortunately, this movement was not associated with school moves and considerable efforts were made to maintain continuity of school placement.

4.6 Attendance had been a problem for the majority of children prior to becoming looked after. For a small minority, mainly those at the secondary stages, it remained a problem. In one local authority 3 children had missed more than 20% of their schooling through absence, and one of those had missed over 40%. However, in the majority of cases, attendance problems had reduced as a result of the children becoming looked after, with those in foster and relative placements having better attendance than those in residential units. One young person said that her foster carers insisted that she went to school, whereas she claimed there had been little encouragement to attend in her previous residential unit.

Sharon (16) lives in a children's unit. She has a baby son who lives with a foster family. Sharon has had erratic school attendance since the age of 12. Now she does not attend school at all, but goes to a home tutor service for about an hour each week. Her social worker has expressed concern at the insufficient amount of schooling Sharon receives. She gets homework from the tutor service but rarely bothers to complete it. Sharon sees herself as having outgrown life at school and as having moved into adulthood. Although she has been described as being "quite an able girl", Sharon will leave school without any Standard Grade qualifications.

4.7 In 4 of the local authorities some of the children had been without school placements for a number of months at some point in their school career. This was the result of being excluded from their original schools, with the authority finding it difficult to place them in alternative provision. One young person had no school placement for 7 months and 2 had been without a placement for 3 months. Two had been "informally"¹⁴ excluded from school with no clear arrangements being made for their education. These examples all concerned boys. When there had been no permanent school place for these young people the education authorities had, in some cases, made arrangements to supply an element of vocational education. In addition to these examples, 2 young people had their education delivered through a home tutoring service. Except in exceptional circumstances, local authorities should ensure that all looked after children have permanent full-time education, however that may be organised.

¹⁴ Guidance on issues concerning exclusion from school is contained in Circular 2/98 which is available from the Scottish Executive. An "informal" exclusion from school of a pupil other than in conformity with the terms of the Schools General (Scotland) Regulations has no statutory backing.

4.8 National statistical information indicates that looked after children, although they make up only 1% of the school population, account for 13% of all exclusions. In the 5 local authorities inspected it was found that 21 of the 50 children in the sample had had at least one exclusion from school during their school career. Although most of these children had only been excluded on a few occasions, a significant minority had been excluded many times. This had resulted in a total of 5 young people in the sample being educated in schools and units specialising in social emotional and behavioural difficulties. Local authorities should take urgent steps to reduce the exclusion rate of looked after children. They should monitor progress against set targets for the reduction of exclusions among looked after children.

Ragvir (16) sat 3 Standard Grades. He achieved one award at General and 2 at Foundation level. He was excluded from his school for pupils with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties when he was still only 15. His unit manager tried to appeal against the decision that Ragvir should never return to that school. The Children's Rights Officer was also involved. However, the local authority was unwilling to consider an appeal not made by a parent. After the exclusion, a meeting was quickly called by Ragvir's social worker and an educational plan put in place. This included 10 hours per week of off-site tutorial time from school staff, and 5 hours per week tutorial time from the local authority's home-school link worker. Ragvir's residential unit supported him with his homework. He had his own room and computer, and staff bought him computer magazines. He hopes to study computing at college.

4.9 Parents have a right of appeal against an authority's decision to exclude their child from school, but carers have no such rights. Children looked after away from home, who have little or no contact with their parents, are thus disadvantaged in comparison with other children since they have no one to appeal on their behalf. However, any child with "legal capacity"¹⁵ has the same right of appeal against exclusion as his or her parents. Local authorities should ensure that looked after children are advised of their right of appeal against exclusion from school and are supported appropriately to appeal, if they wish to do so. A situation may arise where a local authority has parental responsibilities for a child who is subsequently excluded from school. These circumstances should not deter the local authority appealing against the exclusion even although this may mean, in effect, that the local authority is appealing against the decision of the education authority. In certain cases, the involvement of a Children's Rights Officer could be very helpful.

Main recommendation 3

Except in exceptional circumstances, all looked after children should have permanent full-time education, however that may be organised. (4.7-4.8)

¹⁵ The term "legal capacity" is defined in the section 2 of the Age of Legal Capacity (Scotland) Act 1991. In practice most children aged 12 years or over will have the legal capacity in terms of the Act, although it may also hold in the case of younger children.

Chapter 5: Progress, attainment and support for learning

5. Background

5.1 Research has shown that looked after children generally have lower attainment and leave school with far poorer qualifications than their peers. The inspection considered the attainments and qualifications obtained by the children in the sample.

Lesley (16) lived happily with her mother and her stepfather until she was 10 years old. Her mother died tragically and Lesley continued to live with her stepfather. Her school reports for this stage in her life were very positive about her attainments. However, Lesley's stepfather developed depression and alcohol dependency and she moved to live with a relative carer. This placement also broke down. Lesley then moved to a children's unit where she has lived for 3 years. She has had periods of absconding from the unit. School and unit staff are supportive and caring of Lesley, but she is no longer motivated to attain at school. She recently took up a part-time college placement. She has now left school with no Standard Grade qualifications, but has gained one SQA¹⁶ award at Intermediate Level 2 and one at Access Level 3.

Evaluation and recommendations

Progress and attainment

5.2 Social workers, teachers and carers were asked if the children in their care were responding well at school and if they received work appropriate to their age and level of understanding. In most cases it was reported that the children had good experiences in their schools. However, there were a few cases where social workers and carers reported that teachers had been insensitive to, or unaware of, the needs of a particular child.

5.3 In relation to attainment in English language and mathematics, the majority of children in the sample were underachieving in terms of 5-14 targets. Of the pupils at the primary stages, just under half were achieving the expected targets, about one fifth were achieving targets one level below that expected for their age, and about one third were achieving 2 or more levels below that expected for their age.

5.4 The Table in Appendix 2 gives information about the educational qualifications gained by those young people in the sample who had recently completed S4 or S5 in their schools. The national average number of Standard Grade awards per candidate at any level is 7. Of the 25 young people in the sample only 8 achieved this number of awards. The national average number of Credit level awards is 3 per candidate. In this sample, only 2 young people achieved this number of awards. None achieved awards at Higher Grade. Three of the young people in the sample had not been entered for any national examinations and consequently had not gained any awards. While it is very likely that the results obtained by individuals in this sample represent significant achievements for them and their schools, the results

¹⁶ Scottish Qualifications Authority

as a whole present a disappointing picture in comparison with Scottish students as a whole. This is especially true in terms of the quality of awards obtained.

5.5 Some schools tended to be too complacent about the low attainment of their looked after children, perhaps feeling that the children were doing as well as could be expected. When schools were asked to comment on the children's progress, most tended to comment on aspects of their behaviour and how well "settled" they were in school. Generally, insufficient attention was paid to the children's educational progress and how they compared with national levels of attainment. Schools should take particular care to identify the learning needs of all their looked after children, set them challenging but realistic educational targets and systematically monitor the progress made.

5.6 Almost all children in the sample were set regular homework by their teachers, unless it had been decided in individual cases that homework was not to be given. However, one school which provided for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, did not give homework to any of its pupils as staff felt that this would de-motivate them. Looked after children should receive homework commensurate with their age and level of ability. Most in the sample completed their homework tasks. Issues of non-completion of homework were found mainly in secondary schools. In 2 local authorities general disaffection with school, coupled with homework issues and truancy, was a feature for 5 out of 10 young people in the sample. In another local authority there were no reported cases of non-completion of homework.

Support for learning

5.7 About half of the children in the sample were receiving, or had received, learning and/or behaviour support. In total, 19 of the children had special educational needs. Of these 5 had Records of Needs and 2, in special schools, were without Records. While in general the level of support was appropriate, there were some exceptions. For example, one boy waited for a number of years before the school asked for his needs to be assessed by the psychological service. He was found to have significant special educational needs.

5.8 All authorities in Scotland were asked through questionnaires whether they were involved in any special projects, or employed designated staff, to support the education of looked after children. Twenty-one of the 30 authorities who replied said that they did have projects and provided the information in Table 2.

Table 2: Special projects in support of looked after children across 30 authorities.

PROJECT/STAFF	NO OF AUTHORITIES
Home-school link workers or similar	9
Other projects specifically dedicated to the education of looked after children	3
Special budget for outreach teaching staff, tuition, musical instruments etc for looked after children	2
Projects to provide support for pupils having difficulties but not specifically focussed on looked after children	6
Project for looked after children but focussed on mental health not education	1
No details provided of projects	2
TOTAL	23*

*There were some multiple entries.

5.9 The 5 local authorities inspected had a range of support which they provided to looked after children.

- Two local authorities had created a post of "link teacher" for children in residential units. The role of these link teachers was to work directly with individual children and to support them with their homework. The link teachers also offered advice on educational matters to residential staff and liaised with schools and residential units on issues of attendance and exclusion. Link teachers have the potential to be a valuable support for looked after children. However, they did not always keep sufficiently complete records of work with individual pupils to allow educational progress to be monitored, nor did they always ensure that they integrated their work with an individual child sufficiently well with that of the school the child attended.
- A number of the local authorities provided some form of "home tuition" service for children who could not attend school regularly. While the principle of providing home tuition was to be commended, too little tuition time was given in most of the local authorities where it was provided. The average amount of home tuition provided per child was only one or 2 hours each week.
- There were good examples of local authorities working with training providers to offer young people, particularly those who had been excluded from school, some vocational training opportunities. This provision was useful but, unfortunately, rather than helping to supplement the education of these "difficult to place" young people, it was often the only education they received.

Main recommendation 4

Schools should take particular care to identify the learning needs of all their looked after children, set them challenging but realistic educational targets and systematically monitor the progress made. A senior member of staff in each school should maintain an overview of looked after children's progress and take

responsibility for ensuring that appropriate measures are in place for supporting the children's education. (5.4-5.5, 9.19)

Chapter 6: Personal and social development

6. Background

6.1 Personal and social development is a core aspect of education. It is concerned with the development of the personal qualities of self-awareness and self-esteem, and with the development of life skills which enable the child to make relationships, become independent, and operate effectively in society. The inspection considered the ethos of the schools that the children attended and evaluated whether the schools through a sense of fairness, equality and positive relationships, contributed to the personal and social development of their pupils.

Mark (10) lives in a children's unit. He has lived there for 2 years since he and his older sister were removed from their mother's home as a result of a physical assault on Mark by their mother's partner. His sister has since returned to live with their mother, who has moved away from her partner. His mother does not feel that she is able to cope with Mark too. He is now in P6 at his local primary school and although he is getting on well he occasionally has temper tantrums which have resulted in him being excluded from school on one occasion. The school and the care staff are extremely supportive of Mark. His class teacher, in particular, has developed a very good relationship with him. A member of the care staff at the children's unit attended the school Christmas concert and Mark was very pleased to have him there. His school liaises very well with the staff in the children's unit and with his social worker. Both the school and staff in the unit are quick to respond to any concerns about behaviour, and by working together they have ensured that Mark has been maintained in the school. Mark is a bright boy who achieves appropriately for his age. He is at Level C in English language and mathematics. He enjoys school and his attendance is excellent.

Evaluation and recommendations

6.2 The ethos and pastoral care in the schools were generally positive, supportive and caring. There were good examples of children being praised and having their self-esteem enhanced. Primary schools, in particular, were good at celebrating success and many children in the sample had gained certificates for achievements of various kinds. They had them on display at home and were proud to show them to visitors. However, in one school, where the reward system was based mainly on academic attainment, the child in the sample was not attaining highly, and received few rewards.

6.3 Most of the looked after children had personal or emotional problems, to varying degrees, arising from their life experiences. Some pupils were making good progress in their personal and social development, but overall, progress was very variable. In one authority teachers and social workers reported that most of the children's self-esteem was "good" or "improving". Most of these children were in either foster or relative care situations. However, in the other authorities only a minority of children were reported as having good self-esteem. From the inspection it was not possible to ascertain the reasons for these differences. In most cases the

children were not self-conscious about their background and were unconcerned about their teachers and close friends knowing they were looked after.

6.4 Children were asked if they had been bullied at school. Most reported that bullying was not an issue. They reported that they did not feel that their looked after status contributed to any incidences of bullying or of falling out with their peers. A few, mainly in secondary schools, were themselves described as bullies.

6.5 Children had good access to extra-curricular activities which were usually well funded by most social work services. Schools generally provided good opportunities to participate in school trips both within the UK and abroad, and most schools had sporting teams, usually football, which children could join. Children in primary schools were more likely to be involved in extra-curricular activities than those at secondary. Carers offered a variety of activities to the children, including athletics, horse riding, swimming, Brownies and Guides.

Ben (17) has been looked after by a family friend for 2 years. Throughout his time in school Ben was a quiet boy with a few close friends. He did not achieve as well as might have been expected. He obtained more support from his social worker than he did from his guidance teacher, particularly in terms of vocational advice. Some of his teachers were dismissive of his choice of the army as a career. Ben has just left his local school. He obtained SQA Intermediate 2 awards in chemistry and information systems. He failed his Intermediate 2 course in English.

6.6 In all schools normal curricular and vocational guidance procedures applied. All young people in secondary schools had a designated guidance teacher with whom most had regular contact. In S2, they had access to the careers service and to information about possible future careers. In the majority of cases young people received appropriate levels of vocational guidance. However, some problems had occurred with a significant minority. For example, one social worker had not had good enough links with teachers and careers advisers when a particular young person was deciding about the subjects for his Standard Grade courses, and inappropriate choices were made. A few young people lacked the confidence to approach careers advisers who operated a drop-in service, and as a result, they missed out on appropriate advice. Guidance teachers need to be more vigilant to ensure that these young people do not miss out on careers advice. When looked after young people are having their care plans reviewed, local authorities should ensure that effective arrangements are in place for them to receive appropriate curricular and vocational guidance.

6.7 Recording of the ethnicity, language and culture of children was poor both in social work files and in PPRs. Schools were somewhat better than social workers at recording children's religious background. Whenever parents had stipulated that they wished their child to attend a denominational school their wishes had always been met. One young person from an ethnic minority background had services provided in his residential unit which supported his language and culture. However, he chose not to pursue his religion. Another child of racially mixed parentage had services provided by a voluntary agency to help him understand his ethnic and cultural heritage. In one authority, children had access through school and out-of-school activities to such provision as learning to play the chanter, Gaelic lessons, taking part

in a mod, highland dancing and playing shinty. These activities were enjoyed by the children concerned helping them to raise their self-esteem and integrate into the local community.

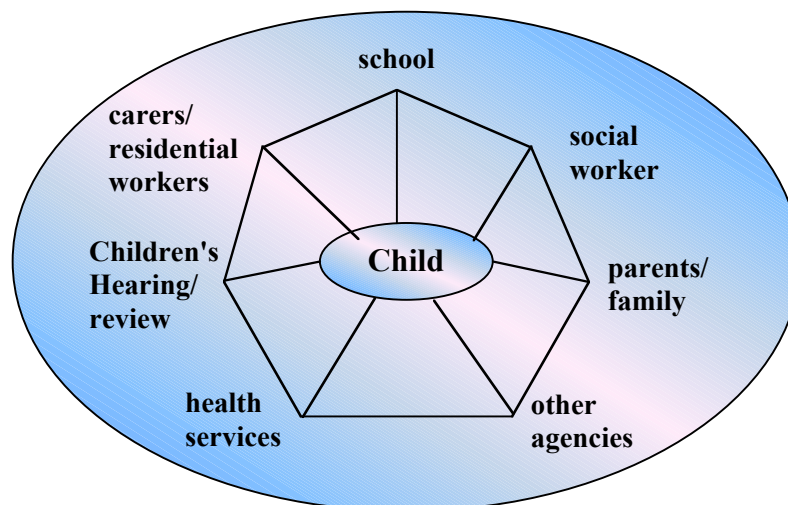
Chapter 7: Working in partnership

7. Background

7.1 The local authority's responsibility for a child who is looked after away from home has been likened to that of a corporate parent. Effective discharge of this responsibility requires the involvement of carers, professionals from a range of agencies, and parents and relatives, as appropriate. For this network to function effectively, all should:

- feel sufficiently consulted and involved;
- be clear about their own and everyone else's roles, rights and responsibilities;
- be confident about, and capable of, fulfilling their roles and responsibilities; and
- have sufficient contact to be assured that the service provided to the child is satisfactory.

The following diagram outlines the network of partnerships which support children looked after away from home.



Evaluation and recommendations

School staff and carers

7.2 The working relationships between school staff and carers were generally positive and strong. Schools treated carers as if they were parents for all school-related purposes. Schools generally spoke very highly of the support they received from carers and vice versa, although a few residential units were commented on less favourably. Carers generally attended parents' evenings although some would not attend if the child's parent was attending. Carers usually contacted schools appropriately with any issues concerning the child, for instance if there had been a

particular occurrence which might lead a child to have a difficult day in school. Schools were positive about the level of contact.

Dawn (15) is the mother of a one-year-old child. She had a difficult pregnancy and missed at least 6 months of school. She received no home tuition during this period although the school did try to arrange it. Dawn and her son live with a foster carer, and Dawn takes her son to nursery on her way to school. She found settling back in to school after her child's birth difficult and there was a period when she was truanting and not doing homework. Regular monitoring meetings between Dawn, her foster carer, social worker and guidance teacher resulted in much improved attendance and application to work. School staff described Dawn's foster carer as having done a "wonderful job" and her social worker as being very regularly in touch, open, helpful and supportive. Dawn obtained 6 Standard Grade awards, 3 at Credit, 2 at General and one at Foundation. She wants to be a hairdresser.

7.3 In a small number of cases, there were poor relationships between some school staff and carers. In these cases, there was a common pattern of the carers becoming increasingly concerned that the child was being treated inappropriately and of them being dissatisfied with the responses they received from schools. The carers would usually, and appropriately, then ask the child's social worker to intervene with the school. This was not always viewed positively by the school and, in one case, the social worker was informed in writing that the school would not discuss a complaint with her. Resolution of such conflicts could take many months or even years and some remained unresolved at the time of the inspection. In most cases, the carers' concerns had some foundation. In these circumstances schools required to be less defensive, and to consider carers' and social workers' concerns dispassionately. They also needed greater awareness of the role of social workers in looked after children's lives.

School staff and social workers

7.4 Partnerships between social workers and school staff were mixed in quality although, encouragingly, both considered that relationships had improved over recent years. As outlined in paragraph 7.3, social workers in a small number of cases found themselves in conflict with school staff. As might be expected, working relationships were generally best where there was regular contact between school staff and social workers. Regular joint meetings involving the social worker, guidance teacher, young person and carer were held for some young people in order to try to resolve difficulties, and were generally successful in doing so. Some social workers acted as advocates for children over such issues as unhappiness with a particular subject or teacher, bullying, reducing the length of exclusion or obtaining auxiliary support. This advocacy was often successful and was usually acceptable to schools provided there was already an established relationship of trust. The advocacy role becomes less necessary as collaboration between social workers and school staff becomes more effective.

Janet (16) has significant physical and learning disabilities. She attends a mainstream secondary school where she has auxiliary help both to push her wheelchair between classrooms and to assist in overcoming her lack of manual dexterity in written work. The school has obtained advice and resources from physiotherapists and occupational therapists to ensure that Janet is safe in school and that her ability to participate is maximised. Janet's foster home is a considerable distance from the school. Taxi transport has been a problem as Janet is the first of a number of children to be picked up and she is frequently uncomfortable and tired by the time she reaches school. Janet's social worker has tried to get the taxi arrangements altered, but without success. He was successful in obtaining a grant for Janet to have a computer at home, which is well used. Janet's foster carers and social worker are in regular touch with the school. They were particularly concerned that Janet was doing so much homework that she was becoming exhausted. This concern was met through a mutual agreement that she should drop one Standard Grade course and get extra homework time in school. Her social worker negotiated with the hospital to ensure that planned surgery would not coincide with her Standard Grade examinations. She obtained 7 Standard Grade awards, 4 at General and 3 at Foundation. She hopes to go to college to do secretarial training.

7.5 There were more differences within authorities than between authorities in the level and nature of the contact between schools and social workers. Most social workers took a considerable interest in the education of looked after children but many of them focussed insufficiently on attainment or advocacy. They rarely received end-of-session reports or other information from schools. Some of the social workers were shown these reports by carers or children. They should receive the reports directly from schools so that they have accurate information concerning the child's progress, behaviour and attendance.

7.6 Although the children were generally under-achieving in relation to their peers, it was found that, in all authorities, social workers generally lacked knowledge about the attainment of their children and tended to overestimate their abilities. In the case of one girl in P6, the social worker described her as "doing very well", when in fact the girl was attaining appropriately in English language (Level C¹⁷) but was about 2 years behind in mathematics (Level B¹⁸). In another case, the social worker thought a child was "doing reasonably well" when in fact she received regular learning support in school and was one of the lowest attaining in the class. A secondary pupil was described by her social worker as "an able girl academically" when the picture provided by the school was of a pupil who was a slow worker and who had been referred for learning support with her written work. Social workers often appeared not to understand the system of attainment levels in the 5-14 curriculum. In a significant minority of cases the social workers appeared to have no detailed knowledge of how particular children were progressing, as they received limited information on their progress from the schools. Social workers should be provided with professional development to enable them to satisfy themselves that high, but realistic, expectations are set for the looked after children for whom they have

¹⁷ Level C should be attainable in the course of P4-P6 by most pupils.

¹⁸ Level B should be attainable by some pupils in P3 or even earlier, but certainly by most pupils in P4.

responsibilities. They should have regular, accurate information about children's attainments.

Social workers and carers

7.7 Social workers were generally very positive about the parental role carers maintained with schools. A social worker described a foster carer as “wanting the child to feel like an achiever not an under-achiever. The carer wants him to feel good about himself as she knows how bad he felt about himself (in the past)”. Many social workers indicated that they had delegated the school contact role partly or entirely to the carers, although such delegation and its limitations were not always explicitly spelt out. In one authority, a decision had been reached that residential carers would have the main liaison role with schools. The responsibilities associated with this action were regularly discussed at unit manager and team meetings. There was a minority of carers, particularly relative carers, who required more social work support to play a parental role with the school. This requirement was not due to lack of commitment on their part but more to age and sometimes infirmity, lack of knowledge of the school curriculum and, for some, lack of confidence and over-deference to teachers.

Relationships with parents

7.8 Parents retained parental responsibilities for the vast majority of children in the sample. The majority of children had contact with one or sometimes both parents. It was expected, therefore, that parents would be involved in their child's education, at the very least receiving school end-of-session reports and regular news about their child's progress. In 3 of the 5 authorities these arrangements were not working well. Many school staff seemed uncertain how to deal with the parents. They seemed unaware of parents retaining legal rights and that they might be entitled to information. They were not aware of the need for parents to sign consent forms for outings and immunisations.

7.9 Social workers and carers, particularly residential workers, were more likely to involve parents in the education of their looked after children. Some would give parents regular news of their child's educational progress, invite them to parents' evenings and school events, and show them end-of-session reports. Nevertheless, there was insufficient consistency or rationale about efforts to involve parents. Sometimes children had been consulted about the involvement of their parents. On some occasions this had resulted in parents not being invited to a parents' evening because the child was worried about the adverse impression their parents might make on the school or their peers. Consultation with children is a sound principle but care must be taken not to distance the parents from appropriate involvement in their children's education.

7.10 In a small number of cases in the sample, parents were having intensive contact with their children involving overnight stays. School staff sometimes found these situations confusing and did not know to whom letters concerning future events should be sent or how homework arrangements should be made. Some young people were also concerned that these arrangements might disadvantage them educationally. One young person found it difficult to find time for homework because of frequent

visits to her mother and social worker. Most of these problems were not insurmountable but required better communication among all concerned.

7.11 Fourteen parents returned questionnaires. Whilst these parents may not be representative of all parents having contact with their looked after children their views are important. The majority felt excluded from their children's education, receiving little information about their child's progress in school and rarely or never being invited to school events. However, they remained interested in their children's education and wanted to be as supportive as possible. Some felt that the social work services had not been sufficiently active in trying to ensure that their child had an appropriate education and that this had jeopardised their child's future career prospects. The minority of parents who felt more involved tended to make much more positive comments both about social workers and the schools their children were attending. Unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary, parents having contact with their children should receive regular information about their children's progress in school including end-of-session reports. More positive consideration should be given to encouraging their attendance at school events.

Children's Hearings

7.12 Reporters and Children's Panel Chairs mainly spoke favourably about foster carers and the educational support which they provided. The Reporters and Chairs in 4 of the authorities, raised a number of concerns about the education of looked after children. These included:

- some social workers' unwillingness to become involved in educational issues, particularly truancy;
- a number of children, including primary age children, who for long periods of time had no school placements or only received a few hours tuition each week;
- a lack of resources to support individual educational plans;
- truancy of young people in residential care;
- a lack of local foster placements; and
- a lack of education welfare/attendance officers.

7.13 Reporters and Chairs reported some delays in receiving reports, particularly from social workers, which sometimes led to cases being continued. Social work reports to Children's Hearings and reviews did not always outline the child's educational progress. When they did so, they were sometimes too vague to be helpful. A pro-forma was supplied to schools by the Hearing. However, the questions on educational attainment related mostly to Standard Grades and were sometimes left blank for younger children. There is a need for questions about attainment in the 5-14 curriculum. The level of attendance of teachers at Children's Hearings varied from about 90% in one authority to less than 50% in another. Where a teacher is not in attendance, the Reporter and Panel members may not always have sufficient knowledge of the curriculum to know whether or not the child's attainment is a cause

for concern. Reporters and Panel members should have good opportunities to learn about developments in education, particularly in the curriculum.

7.14 Attendance at Hearings was an anxious ordeal for a number of the younger children, especially for those who did not wish to return home and who felt under pressure from parents to say in the Hearing that they wanted more contact or to return home. Their anxiety manifested itself in tearfulness, nightmares and sleepwalking, extreme reluctance to attend the Hearing or agitation in the Hearing. In some cases, schools were aware of these anxieties, either because the child discussed them in school or because of the child's behaviour. The Reporters and Chairs were generally reluctant to excuse children from attending Hearings because they felt it was important that they should hear their views. One Reporter and Chair said they would excuse a child if he or she was seriously unhappy about attending and they would try to ensure they found out the child's views in other ways, for example by tape recording or letter. This statement, whilst welcome and in keeping with the Children's Hearing (Scotland) Rules 1996, did not match with the experiences of one of the sample children in the authority. Where children subject to supervision requirements, are distressed by attendance at Hearings, a range of alternative ways of finding out their views should be explored. Arrangements should be in place to alert schools to children's anxieties about forthcoming Hearings so that additional support can be provided to children if required.

7.15 In a number of cases decisions had been reached at a review of the care plan to apply for a Parental Responsibilities Order (PRO), and in one case for an Adoption Order. In these circumstances, supervision requirements and the associated attendance of the child at Hearings were no longer appropriate. However often applications were delayed, in 2 cases for as much as 4 years, ostensibly because of workload pressures. Ironically, the making of a PRO or Adoption Order might have reduced the subsequent social work time required in these cases. Where it has been decided to apply for Parental Responsibilities Orders and Adoption Orders, greater priority should be given to expediting applications.

Main recommendations 5 and 6

Local authorities should develop an integrated policy covering education and social work which ensures that the educational needs of looked after children are met effectively. They should also provide joint professional development for education and social work staff, and carers, to ensure that they are able to contribute effectively towards the implementation of the policy. (7.6, 8.5, 9.6, 9.10)

Unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary, parents having contact with their children should receive regular information about their children's progress in school including end-of-session reports. (7.11)

Chapter 8: Carers' support for learning

8. Background

8.1 Twenty-nine of the sample children were placed with approved foster carers, 6 were living with a relative or friend, and 15 were placed in residential units.

Evaluation and recommendations

Foster and relative/friend placements

8.2 Without exception, foster carers tried to provide a positive environment for learning. However, the majority had no personal experience of further or higher education and they were often unsure how to help children with their studies. Some had bought educational books or visited the child's school for advice. Occasionally children felt over-pressurised and attempts to help them could end in tears. Older sons and daughters of foster carers, or older siblings, were often helpful in providing educational support and some also provided good role models for foster children. For example, a daughter in one foster family was a university student. She had developed a close relationship with the fostered young person who now also wanted to pursue a university education.

Tom (11) lived with a foster family in a rural area. His foster carer drove him to the school bus stop every day. He moved to his present school, aged 7, because he had not learned to read and write at the local school. His foster carer recommended the change of school as she had been very impressed with the way staff had helped her own son who had learning difficulties. Tom's foster carer and social worker regularly attended school events and had very good relationships with school staff. His foster carer transported him considerable distances so that he could take part in sports and attend 2 youth clubs. When Tom was interviewed he ran out of fingers to count his best friends, let alone other friends. Tom sometimes asked his foster brothers and sister for help with his homework or if he was really stuck he asked his foster carer. The family played a lot of card and board games. Tom read for pleasure most nights, owned a number of books and borrowed others from his foster brother or the mobile library. Tom's school attainments were now almost on a par with his peer group and his behaviour was excellent.

8.3 Conditions in foster homes varied quite considerably. Some children had their own rooms and could find quiet space for study, others might share a room with up to 3 other children which made it crowded and noisy. One child was seen doing her homework on a rather dark lower bunk. In some foster homes, with considerable numbers of children in placement, homework was done more formally around the kitchen table with one of the carers advising and supervising, and the children helping each other. This arrangement worked well. Some foster homes had good resources for learning while others were limited. A number had computers, sometimes provided by the social work services. Some, but not all, children were encouraged to use libraries and most were encouraged to read for pleasure. Wider educational activities, such as attendance at clubs and joining in local cultural events were a feature in many foster homes.

8.4 Relative carers were less likely than foster carers to have educational materials in their homes. They were often on pensions or benefits and their lack of resources was exacerbated, in some authorities, by the policy of paying relative carers lower allowances than foster carers. Relative carers generally provided very stable and secure long-term placements. They encouraged children with their education but sometimes lacked confidence in helping them because of their own educational background or because of the time which had elapsed since they had left school. Sometimes younger relatives such as aunts, uncles and cousins were closely involved with the child and they were often a good source of educational support. The support that foster and relative carers need to provide an educationally rich environment should be assessed as part of the carer approval process.

8.5 Given the educational needs of the children in the sample, it is unlikely that the educational commitment of carers will, on its own, be sufficient to help them overcome their difficulties. Carers should be given advice about education. This advice might, for example, be about literacy schemes either for the child or for the carers themselves, or choices of books or computer programs. They should also be provided with educational resources, when necessary. Training should be made available and educational issues should be discussed at carer support groups. Where home-school link workers are in place their remit should be extended to include foster and relative carers. Educational advice, training and support should be more readily available to foster and relative/friend carers (see main recommendation 5).

Residential placements

8.6 Children in residential care were, on the whole, those with more educational difficulties and lower educational achievements. It was beyond the scope of the inspection to evaluate whether they were placed in residential care because of their educational difficulties, or whether their difficulties were caused or exacerbated by their placement in residential care. It is likely that a mixture of these 2 processes was at work. The educational support provided in residential units was more variable than in foster homes. There were considerable differences both between authorities and, in one case, within an authority. In some units the support was very good with considerable emphasis placed on valuing education and study support, and staff being pro-active in ensuring the children's right to a good education. In some units all children had their own room. In one unit, a separate room had been equipped as a study with computers, desk and small library and it was well used. In others, where study space was less generous, efforts were made to create quiet space by allowing and supervising children to do homework in a dining room or staff office.

8.7 One authority, which had a high percentage of its looked after children in residential, as opposed to foster care, had made considerable and fruitful efforts to make their residential units educationally rich environments. Statistics concerning educational outcomes were collected from residential units and education was a regular topic at unit managers' meetings. All the children had access to computers, and special programs were purchased for children with learning difficulties. Children were encouraged to be library members and there was a wide range of books, including reference books, available. One of the units had established a link with students taking initial teacher education courses at their local university and had

annual visits from students. Another unit had the majority of its school leavers entering higher or further education in the current year. While this unit had the advantage of stable staffing and long term residents it was rightly proud of its achievements and could serve as a model for others.

8.8 By contrast, some units in other authorities were providing educationally poor environments. In some which had shared bedrooms, there was insufficient quiet space for children to do their homework. In one unit, young people were doing homework on their knees on their beds. This unit reported that its young people had “appalling Standard Grade results”. Some units had a rather passive attitude to homework and did not make arrangements to get information about homework from schools. Some of the children interviewed did not feel that they had sufficient support with their homework. In some units there was no computer available and in one unit, staff complained they had no money for basic educational resources such as books, pencils and rubbers. In some of the units the majority of residents were not attending school, either through exclusion or refusal to attend. An educationally negative ethos existed whereby existing residents influenced new residents to reject education. Some staff made efforts to keep the young people involved in educational activities, for example by arranging museum and library visits and encouraging poetry writing. Some also tried to get work from schools for excluded pupils, but did not always meet with success. Some staff spoke of a sense of demoralisation. They felt unsupported by their management, by the education department and by the young people’s schools. They had run out of strategies to try to ensure that the youngsters in their care received a worthwhile education.

8.9 In one authority, a residential unit was closed down during the period of the inspection. The closure proved a disruptive and damaging experience for one young person who was about to sit Standard Grade examinations. Whilst the timing of any particular closure may be unavoidable, educational needs must be taken into consideration when timing unit closures. Children looked after in residential units should receive the same level of educational support which caring, well-resourced parents would provide. Local authorities should undertake an audit of their residential units to assess how far they are educationally rich environments and, where shortcomings are found take appropriate action.

Main recommendation 7

As part of their quality assurance procedures local authorities should undertake an audit of their residential units to assess how far they are educationally rich environments and, where shortcomings are found, make plans to take appropriate action. (8.9)

Chapter 9: Policies, management and quality assurance

9. Background

9.1 Effective strategies to improve the educational experiences and attainment of looked after children are required at a number of levels: national, local authority, institutional/agency (i.e. school, social work area team, fostering team and residential unit) and individual (i.e. social workers, residential workers, foster carers, teachers, parents and children themselves). This chapter considers the Children's Services Plans from all 32 local authorities, the reviews of Children's Services Plans received, and the questionnaires returned by 30 local authorities. It evaluates the policies pursued at a local authority and institutional level by the 5 local authorities inspected.

Evaluation and recommendations

Local authority policies

9.2 The education of looked after children was not a prominent issue in most local authorities' Children's Services Plans. Only a minority of the 32 addressed the issue explicitly. The reviews of Plans were more likely to have addressed the education of looked after children than the original Plans. Of the 5 local authorities inspected, only one had included the education of looked after children in its Children's Services Plan.

9.3 Children's Services Plans and their reviews provide important opportunities to develop the educational provision for looked after children, particularly where they contain targets for improvement. They also provide an important means of being publicly accountable. Local authorities should include explicit consideration of the education of looked after children in Children's Services Plans and reviews.

9.4 Twelve of the 30 local authorities which returned questionnaires said that they had a policy on the education of looked after children and 11 supplied details. A further 4 authorities were hoping or planning to develop a policy. However, only a few policies had the primary and specific aim of considering the educational needs of looked after children. These addressed a wide range of relevant issues (see Appendix 3). Four of the authorities inspected had specific policies, 2 of them still in draft form.

9.5 The implementation of policy was only examined in one of the authorities inspected because the policies in the others were either in draft form or very recent. The policy which was examined related to Educational Support Plans for looked after children. The Support Plans were soundly based and well presented. Helpful guidance on their implementation had been issued. This was a commendable and promising development but some aspects of implementation required further consideration. These included the following:

- mixed levels of awareness of the policy throughout the authority;

- slow, and sometimes single department implementation of Support Plans. Only 6 out of the 10 sample children had a Support Plan and their development had not always included both school and social work staff;
- confusion about how the Support Plans might fit with Records of Needs, individualised educational programmes and reviews of the care plan; and
- the poor quality of completion of the Support Plans, in spite of their potential value.

9.6 Local authorities should develop an integrated policy covering education and social work which ensures that the educational needs of looked after children are met effectively. They should also provide joint professional development for education and social work staff, and carers, to ensure that they are able to contribute effectively towards the implementation of the policy (see main recommendation 5). The policy should clarify the educational difficulties faced by looked after children and what should be done about them. Appendix 3 provides a list of issues which such a policy might cover. In order for it to be implemented effectively, some key steps need to be taken. These include consultation with staff, carers and young people; widespread briefing and training; dissemination of the policy; regular monitoring of implementation; and regular review of whether the policy is achieving its aims.

Policies for schools, social workers and carers

9.7 A number of school staff, including some head teachers, said that they did not consider that they had any special role in relation to looked after children beyond the general responsibility they had for all children in their school. A few felt that looked after children were not necessarily a disadvantaged group. However, in best practice they were usually aware that the special circumstances of looked after children did merit particular consideration. They acknowledged the importance of the following:

- issues of confidentiality and the need for sensitivity because of the children's background, circumstances and vulnerability;
- the need for joint working with social workers, carers and the Children's Panel, and involvement in reviews of the care plan; and
- an emphasis on building the self-esteem of looked after children through praise, consulting them about who should attend reviews, of monitoring their progress unobtrusively and ensuring that the older children attended careers interviews.

9.8 The vast majority of social workers saw their main role in the education of looked after children as liaison with carers, schools and other agencies, rather than actively promoting the child's education. Liaison with parents concerning their child's education was rarely mentioned. In the best practice, social workers mentioned the importance of the following:

- effective collaboration with school staff;
- advocacy, where necessary, on behalf of the child with the school;

- direct educational work with the child which might include visits to places of interest, attendance at school events or encouragement for children who lacked parental support;
- arranging funding for educational activities; and
- supporting carers in their educational role with the child.

In consultation with local authorities, the Scottish Executive should develop methods of spreading good practice in the education and care of looked after children.

9.9 Foster carers described their role mainly as “just getting on with it” and most said they had not received any guidance on their role with regard to education. Some residential carers had a more considered view of their role, particularly in one authority where the education of looked after children was discussed regularly at the unit managers’ meeting. Foster carer handbooks, which existed in all 5 authorities, and statements of functions and objectives, which existed in all the residential units visited, all covered education. However, some of the coverage needed to be more detailed and up-to-date, with sharper objectives. Local authorities should develop and implement policies to help foster carers and residential care staff promote the education of the children in their care.

9.10 The questionnaires returned by local authorities revealed a mixed picture regarding the extent to which training had been provided on the education of looked after children. Some staff and carers had the opportunity of joint training on the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 or LAC materials (see footnote 11) and, on some of these courses, there had been limited coverage of the educational needs of looked after children. Some education staff, social work staff and carers in the 5 sample authorities had received similar training but more detailed and specific training on the educational needs of looked after children had rarely been provided. Educational staff would benefit from greater knowledge of the reasons children become looked after, the legal definition of a looked after child, the impact of the trauma they have experienced and its effect on their education, and the rights of children and parents. Social work staff would benefit from greater knowledge of children's cognitive development, the school curriculum and how schools work with children. Both education and social work staff would benefit from greater knowledge of research findings and joint training on these issues. Local authorities should provide joint professional development for education and social work staff to ensure that they are able to contribute effectively towards meeting the authority's corporate responsibility for the education and care of looked after children (see main recommendation 5).

Local authority committees and structures

9.11 Three of the authorities inspected had separate elected members' committees for education and social work although the social work committee included other services in 2 of these authorities. The remaining 2 authorities had children's committees covering education and social work services for children, although one still retained separate education and social work committees as well. Only one of these authorities had taken steps to combine its education and social work services for children under the one overall manager. Given their recent introduction, it was not

possible to evaluate the effects of these different organisational structures on the education of looked after children.

9.12 Working relationships between senior managers in education and social work appeared close in most of the authorities visited. All 5 authorities in the sample had senior managers in education with designated responsibilities for looked after children, as did 75% of the authorities who returned questionnaires. In one authority inspected, 2 jointly appointed senior posts had been created. In another authority, senior managers of the 2 departments met weekly to resolve policy issues and any particular difficulties with individual children. Current working relationships were often contrasted with a much more negative picture from a few years ago when, as one manager described it, “we never met but would just fight about money for placements”. The evidence found of increased joint working and closer working relationships at both member and officer levels was welcome and encouraging.

9.13 Three authorities operated Joint Assessment Teams or School Liaison Teams (hereafter called JATs) in all of their secondary schools. None of the authorities had JATs in primary schools. JATs were standing groups comprising staff from the school, the local social work area team, specialist staff such as educational psychologists or group-workers and representatives from other organisations such as the police, careers or youth service. JATs met regularly to consider any pupils experiencing behavioural difficulties in school, particularly those at risk of exclusion. They aimed to draw up multi-disciplinary support packages to resolve pupils’ difficulties. Looked after children were highly represented among those discussed at JATs, which is not surprising given the higher than average number of exclusions involving looked after children. There is a role for JATs to:

- monitor all looked after children at the time they become looked after, or when they change school, to ensure that all the relevant agencies are providing necessary support: and
- ensure that lines of communication are clear and that any potential difficulties caused by the child’s removal from home or change of school can be dealt with sensitively and appropriately.

Social workers' caseloads

9.14 Most of the social workers interviewed had caseloads of between 20 and 35 children and families, a minority of which were cases of looked after children. In one authority, where some teams carried generic caseloads, numbers ranged as high as 60 cases. Another authority was considerably increasing its complement of social workers because of concerns that workloads had become too high. The majority of social workers said that they did not have sufficient time to address fully the educational needs of looked after children. Nevertheless, some were addressing them well. Their success appeared to derive from good personal organisation and clarity of purpose in the tasks that they undertook.

Resources

9.15 Most residential and foster carers were confident that, if asked, their local authority would provide additional funds for items such as books, school trips, equipment or tuition, although most foster carers had not put this to the test. Relative carers were less certain that additional resources would be provided though they also had not asked. In one authority, which had recently made financial cutbacks, carers as a whole were less certain that resources would be made available and one foster carer had been refused a grant for her foster children to go on an educational trip to France with the school.

9.16 Social workers, carers and young people were often worried about whether finance would be available to support young people in further and higher education, and during their holidays, once they reached their 18th birthday. Whilst social work managers said that the money would always be found, the lack of dedicated budgets meant that a special case needed to be made on each occasion. Since local authorities aimed to increase the numbers of looked after young people entering further and higher education such “ad hoc” arrangements are insufficient. It is recommended that specific financial arrangements are made which help young people feel confident that they will be adequately supported until they complete their chosen course of study.

Quality assurance

9.17 Only 4 of the 30 authorities returning questionnaires said they maintained a central register or database of information about the education of looked after children covering aspects such as attainment, attendance, rates of exclusion, and the type of service they were receiving. In all these authorities the information held was only partial. For example, in one of the authorities inspected, residential units provided regular returns on attendance and exclusions of looked after children and yearly returns of Standard Grade results but information was not collected about children in foster care or about attainment in the 5-14 curriculum. Another authority had sent questionnaires to all their schools to collect information about looked after children's progress. However, they had only had a 40% return. A number of authorities indicated that they had plans to start collecting such information in future. Without accurate statistics it is impossible to monitor the effects of any strategies aimed at improving the educational performance of looked after children. Each local authority should keep accurate statistics on a range of aspects of the education of looked after children as agreed in the Social Work Information and Review Group document "Local and National Information Requirements for Social Work".¹⁹

9.18 The significant number of cases in the sample for which assessments, care plans and placement agreements were not in place indicated a lack of monitoring by social work services managers. This lack of monitoring sometimes occurred even where authorities had clear policies and expectations of what was required. It is unacceptable that local authorities have failed to implement statutory procedures relating to looked after children some 3 years after their introduction. Local

¹⁹ Social Work Information and Review Group (2000), Local and National Information Requirements for Social Work: Joint Statement August 2000, (CoSLA, ADSW, Accounts Commission, Scottish Executive).

authorities should implement quality assurance procedures to ensure that statutory requirements are met effectively (see main recommendation 2).

9.19 The majority of primary and special school headteachers knew how many looked after children they had on their roll and who they were, although they did not always have an overview of their attendance and attainment. Secondary school headteachers did not usually know how many looked after children they had on their roll. Three out of the 5 authorities inspected noted in their questionnaires that there were schools in their authority which had designated staff with responsibilities for looked after children, or that they were about to implement such a system. A further 4 authorities returning questionnaires also responded positively on this point. However, it was apparent that these staff were not in place in all schools and, where they were, remits often varied considerably from school to school. It was not necessarily the case that there was one member of staff in each school who had an overview of all looked after children including their attainments and attendance. A senior member of staff in each school should maintain an overview of looked after children's progress and take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate measures are in place for supporting the children's education (see main recommendation 4).

Main recommendations 8 and 9

Local authorities should include explicit and targeted consideration of the education of looked after children in Children's Services Plans and reviews. (9.2-9.3)

Local authorities should keep accurate statistics on a range of aspects of the education of looked after children as agreed in the Social Work Information and Review Group document "Local and National Information Requirements for Social Work". (9.17)

Sampling information

A1.1 Thirty authorities returned at least one of the questionnaires sent to them; most returns were completed jointly by social work and education personnel even where they were in separate departments. Thirty two Children's Services Plans were examined but only about one third of authorities had supplied reviews of these Plans to the Social Work Services Inspectorate.

A1.2 The social work and education files of 50 children were examined, 10 in each authority. Twenty five of them were boys and 25 were girls; 25 were aged 9-11 and 25 were aged 15-16. All the younger children were in primary schools except for one who was in S1. All the older children were in, or of an age to be in, S4 or S5 at the time the samples were chosen. The children were mostly in mainstream schools. All the schools were managed by local authorities except one which was run by a voluntary organisation. In one case, the school attended was in the child's neighbouring authority.

A.1.3 Types of school attended by sample children and young people.

School Type	Children Aged 9-11	Young People Aged 15-16	Total
Mainstream Primary	20	-	20
Mainstream Secondary	1	15	16
SEBD*	2	2	4
Learning Difficulties	1	1	2
Special support unit	1	2	3
Home tuition	-	2	2
Residential school (admitted during inspection)	-	1	1
No educational provision (excluded)	-	2	2
Total	25	25	50

*Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

A1.4 At the time the samples were chosen the care placements were as follows:-

Placement Type	Children Aged 9-11	Young People Aged 15-16	Total
Foster Care	18	11	29
Relative/friend care	4	2	6
Residential care	3	12	15
Total	25	25	50

A1.5 This distribution was representative of the placement ratios found for children aged 9-11 and 15-16 in the 5 authorities. Four of the sample children were part of 2 sibling pairs and each pair was placed together. Almost all the rest of the sample children were in different placements. A considerable number of other children were in placements with siblings who fell outside the sample age range.

A1.6 Two children came from ethnic minority or mixed parentage background (4% of the sample). Whilst collection of national statistics on ethnicity of looked after children had not started at the time of the inspection, research has suggested that numbers of ethnic minority, and mixed parentage looked after children are likely to be less than 1% of all looked after children.

A1.7 Forty seven social workers or team leaders who were working with, or had very recently worked with, the sample children were interviewed. Social work case files were read for all the sample children from 1 April 1997, the point of implementation of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, except where it was necessary to read earlier sections in order to make sense of what had happened to the child more recently.

A1.8 By the time of the inspection, 48 of the sample of 50 children were, or had most recently been, enrolled in school; 2 young people had home tutors. Forty seven day schools were visited. In each school, inspectors interviewed the headteacher and the teacher who knew the sample child best and in 4 authorities, any learning or behaviour support teachers involved with the child. A wide range of staff was interviewed (details below). The home tutor of a girl receiving home tuition was also interviewed. The school files and Pupil Progress Record (PPRs) were examined for all the children for whom they were available, 2 were missing and 2 were still located in previous schools.

A.1.9 Number and types of school staff interviewed.

Staff Members	Primary	Secondary	Total
Head/Acting Head*	19	16	35
Depute/Assistant Head/Senior Teacher	3	10	13
Registration/Class Teacher	16	3	19
Principal Guidance/Guidance Teacher	-	22	22
Learning or Behaviour Support or SEN Teacher	4	8	12
Other Teacher	1	3	4
Other e.g. School Nurse, School Social Worker	-	3	3
Total	43	65	108

*In 2 small rural primary schools, the headteacher was also the child's class teacher.

A1.10 Thirty of the 50 children had contact with 31 parents. Parents were sent a short questionnaire asking them how far they were kept informed and involved with their child's education. Fourteen parents of 14 children returned questionnaires.

A1.11 Although the intention was to interview 25 children, only 21 were finally interviewed. A number were not approached for interviews because of their particular life circumstances. Of those approached, 9 decided not to be interviewed, sometimes not until the time of the interview. In a further 2 cases, carers decided that the child's current circumstances made an interview inappropriate. The following interviews took place:-

Children and Young People Interviewed	Children Aged 9-11	Young People Aged 15-16	Total
Girls	9	6	15
Boys	3	3	6
Total	12	9	21

A1.12 In addition to gender disparity, these 21 children were not very representative of the group as a whole. They tended to be the more settled children, experiencing less educational difficulties and able to manage a 40-minute interview with an adult. Rich material was gathered from these interviews which has proved useful for illustrating points in this report. However, caution has been exercised about generalising from the children's interviews, except where a generalisation can be corroborated from another source.

A1.13 It was intended to interview the foster, relative/friend and residential carers of the children interviewed. In the case of residential units, joint interviews with the unit manager and key worker were planned. In cases where children refused interviews at the last minute, interviews with their carers were usually continued. Consequently, 14 sets of foster carers of 16 children, 2 sets of relative carers of 3 children and staff caring for, or who had cared for, 10 children in 9 residential units were interviewed.

A1.14 Education and social work senior managers with responsibility for looked after children were interviewed in all 5 authorities. The Reporter in each authority was interviewed, but only 2 Children's Panel Chairs were able to make themselves available for interview. Two authorities had children's rights workers in social work services and a third authority had a children's rights worker based in the education department. These staff were interviewed.

A1.15 Staff from 13 specialist projects or initiatives established to support the education of looked after children and also from projects which had a wider remit but which included looked after children were interviewed. These projects were nominated by the 5 local authorities. (see below)

A.1.16 Projects visited in the 5 sample local authorities

PROJECT	NUMBER
Home link teachers for looked after children and young people	2
Pupil Support Workers	1
Group Work and Family Support Workers	1
Residential and Outreach Educational Support Services (run by a voluntary organisation)	1
Class for Young People who have been in secure care	1
Primary Support Unit	1
Alternative Primary School (run by a voluntary organisation)	1
Secondary Support Base	2
Alternative to Exclusion Project	1
Alternatives to Care Project	1
Youth Project (run by a voluntary organisation)	1
Total	13

A1.17 A wide range of policy and other documents provided by the 5 local authorities was considered. These included foster carer handbooks and statements of functions and objectives from residential units.

Table: Courses taken and awards obtained by 25 looked after young people

Courses taken by 25 young people	Qualifications gained
8 Standard Grades	2 Standard Grades- general 2 Standard Grades - foundation ²⁰
7 Standard Grades	1 Standard Grade- general 6 Standard Grades- foundation
3 Standard Grades	1 Standard Grade- general 2 Standard Grades- foundation
4 SQA units (at Access 3 level)	6 Standard Grades - general ²¹ 1 Standard Grade - foundation 4 units (at Access 3)
4 SQA units (at Intermediate level)	2 units (at Intermediate 2 level)
8 Standard Grades	6 Standard Grades – general 2 Standard Grades – foundation
7 Standard Grades	1 Standard Grade- credit 4 Standard Grades- general 2 Standard Grades- foundation
1 Higher	
8 Standard Grades	3 Standard Grades- credit 2 Standard Grades- general 1 Standard Grade- foundation
not entered for Standard Grades	no awards
8 Standard Grades	4 Standard Grades- credit 4 Standard Grades- general
7 Standard Grades	no awards
7 Standards Grades	1 Standard Grade- general 6 Standard Grades- foundation
3 SQA units (Intermediate and Access level)	1 unit at Access 3 level 1 unit at Intermediate 2 level
3 Standard Grades	1 Standard Grade- general 2 Standard Grades- foundation
6 Standard Grades	3 Standard Grades- foundation
7 Standard Grades	4 Standard Grades- general 2 Standard Grades- foundation
7 Standard Grades	4 Standard Grades- general 3 Standard Grades- foundation
8 Standard Grades	5 Standard Grades- general 3 Standard Grades- foundation
5 SQA units (intermediate level)	5 SQA units – Intermediate level
not entered for Standard Grades	no awards
8 Standard Grades	1 Standard Grade- general 5 Standard Grades- foundation
5 Standard Grades	1 Standard Grade- credit 3 Standard Grades- general 1 Standard Grade- foundation
1 Higher, 1 Intermediate 2	Intermediate 2
3 Standard Grades	3 Standard Grades- general
8 Standard Grades	5 Standard Grades- general 1 Standard Grade- foundation
6 Standard Grades	4 Standard Grades-general 2 Standard Grades- foundation
not entered for Standard Grades	no awards

²⁰ Where no qualification is noted no award was obtained.

²¹ The Standard Grades were gained in the previous year.

Key Policy Issues

The following range of key issues was referred to in local authority policies.

- Roles and responsibilities of managers, schools, social work area teams, social workers, teachers and carers.
- Consultation with, and involvement of, parents covering their legal rights and necessary consents.
- Consultation with, and involvement of, children.
- Information exchange, including that required by Regulation 7 of the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations, 1996, and confidentiality.
- Continuity of education, transport arrangements and procedures in relation to changes of school.
- Assessment, including psychological assessment, care and education planning and reviews of the care plan.
- Monitoring and improving pupils' attainments in classwork and examinations.
- Monitoring and reducing non-attendance and exclusions.
- Placements in residential schools and their funding.
- Roles of specialist post holders e.g. home-school link workers.
- Meeting racial, religious, linguistic and cultural needs.
- Anti-stereotyping or discrimination against looked after children.
- Likely difficulties of looked after children in school and the reasons for them.
- Joint teacher and social worker training.
- Post-school/post-looked after provision including funding for further and higher education arrangements and the vacations from such arrangements.
- Relationships with other policies and procedures.

The content of this report has shown that almost all of these issues require attention, although not all of them will need attention in all authorities.

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