

Improving the attainment of looked after young people in secondary schools

Guidance for Schools





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Foreword

For many children in care, school life can be challenging. They may find it harder to trust adults; their educational experience may have been disrupted; and their capacity to build and maintain friendships may be impaired. They need good schools, with good staff who understand how to support and challenge them.

Good schools can be the key to their success. School can provide the stability they need, a safe place in a turbulent world, an opportunity to excel, a route map out of their difficulties into a more positive future.

This guide captures the experience of good schools who have worked well to support children in care. Spreading their good practice could benefit many more children across the country.

There is nothing magic about how to support children in care. A good school, which gets to know its pupils and aims to meet their individual needs, will take on the task naturally. With this guide, they should feel more confident in facing any challenges these children present, and fulfilling the potential each child has.

Sir Paul Ennals

Chief Executive
National Children's Bureau



Introduction

'First and foremost it's not about laptops or tutoring. It's about that daily contact and intensive support from dedicated adults in the school'. (Headteacher)

This guidance is based on the evidence obtained from visits to a small sample of 17 secondary schools. The schools were recommended by their local authorities as having very effective practice in supporting looked after young people and ensuring that they make good progress and achieve appropriate levels of attainment.

The schools exhibited a number of qualities in their work with looked after young people and nine **key qualities** were identified which characterise and summarise the schools' effective practice.

Effective schools support looked after young people by:

1. Doing the things they do for all young people but more so
2. Balancing high levels of support with real challenge
3. Skilfully linking each young person to a key person they relate well to
4. Making it a priority to know the young people well and to build strong relationships
5. Developing strong partnerships with carers¹, local authorities and specialist agencies
6. Making things happen and seeing things through
7. Ensuring consistency as well as discrete flexibility
8. Actively extending the horizons of each young person
9. Planning for future transitions

1. In this document the term 'carer' embraces foster carers, residential key workers and kinship carers.

In the subsequent sections each key quality is considered in turn. Each section has the following structure:

Why is this important?

This describes some of the experiences and characteristics of looked after young people which schools need to support and overcome in order to help the young person learn.

What these schools do

This summarises the specific actions and approaches adopted by the schools to support their looked after young people.

Quotations and brief case studies are included to capture the essence of the schools' practice.

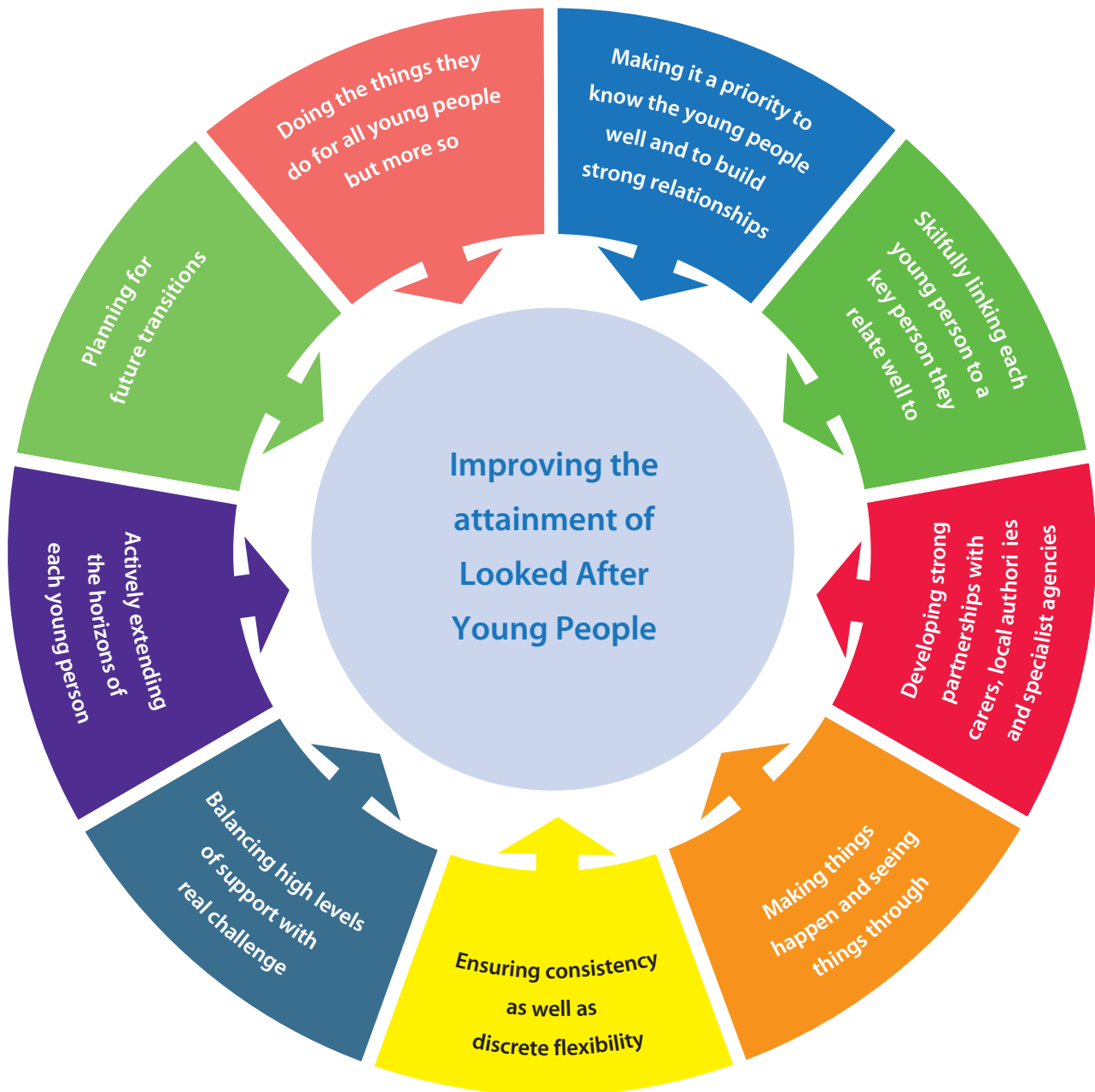
Things to consider

These are some aspects of a school's practice that may be worth reviewing.

Annex 1 includes a simple self-evaluation grid which a school could use to review its own practice in supporting looked after young people. The schools visited as part of the study are listed in **Annex 2**. Background information on the methodology of the study and the performance of looked after children are included in **Annex 3** and **Annex 4** respectively.



Key qualities exhibited by schools which provide high quality support for looked after young people



1. Doing the things they do for all young people but more so

Why is this important?

Many looked after young people have suffered from a disrupted school experience - they may have attended a number of schools or been absent from school for extended periods of time. The subsequent gaps in their learning are very likely to have become barriers to progress, perhaps developed over a long period of time. This makes it very difficult for them to do well in school. The complexity of what can often be a fragmented educational experience needs close analysis and careful planning by key teachers to increase rates of progress and build the young person's confidence and self-esteem. So even in schools where personalised learning and tracking are well established, these young people need particular attention. However, this extra attention or vigilance needs to be subtle because the young people often don't want to be seen to be treated differently from their peers.

What these schools do

- **Promote personalised learning and a culture where every child does matter**

Headteachers expect every adult to prioritise the personal, emotional and academic needs of the vulnerable young people. Induction to help teachers and others to prioritise the needs of looked after young people is provided for all new staff.

'First and foremost it's not about laptops or tutoring. It's about that daily contact and intensive support from dedicated adults in the school'. (Headteacher)

- **Ensure that specific needs and barriers to learning are identified, recorded in each young person's personal education plan and progress is reviewed on a regular basis**

On entry to the school, and particularly if this is during the year rather than at the beginning, specialist and subject teachers work closely with the looked after young person to assess their strengths and weaknesses and develop a personal education plan (PEP) that will help them to catch up and keep up with their peers. The PEP also often includes advice to staff on behaviour 'triggers' and how these can be avoided. The designated teacher with the support of other staff monitors the impact of the actions closely and is rigorous in evaluating, with the young person, whether the targeted support has worked. If necessary, the school is always willing to try other approaches.

'Flexibility is the key. We never give up on them – we just keep trying different approaches'. (Designated teacher)

- **Track the young people's progress as a special group**

The progress of each looked after young person is rigorously tracked. Special attention is given to make sure they are on track to achieve their targets and, if not, the best strategy to secure progress is worked out with the young person.

'We know we are rigorous with our use of data, but for looked after pupils we scrutinise it even more'.
(Headteacher)

'We keep a watchful eye on the looked after young people – discreetly behind the scenes – we don't make a big fuss. We are aware that they are disadvantaged and underachieve, but we treat them as everyone else. But we look out for them and make sure their needs are met'.
(Designated teacher)

'If I don't get the help I needed during the lesson, I know my teachers will always be willing to give me some extra time after the lesson. They do that for everyone'. (Year 11 girl)

'The tutoring has really made a difference to my work in English. I've been able to use the things I've done with my tutor to produce better quality work in class'. (Year 7 girl)

'My tutor has really helped me. I am now much better at planning essays and I got a grade B for my last piece of English work'. (Year 11 girl)

- **Provide proactive support through the designated teacher**

The designated teacher co-ordinates arrangements relating to the PEP review to ensure education features strongly in the statutory review procedure of the young person's wider care plan. S/he works with the teachers to regularly review progress to targets and evaluate the impact of intervention strategies. Teachers are aware that prior attainment and predictive models for target setting may not provide a good guide for these young people, as the targets generated will often be undemanding if previous progress and attainment have been low.

- **Implement a range of intervention strategies to address both social and academic needs**

The approach encompasses quality first teaching, classroom support and additional provision, including one-to-one tuition which the schools find to be successful because it can be highly personalised. The priority is to support the student to 'keep up' as well as 'catch up' as some of these young people have significant gaps in their learning and have fallen behind. But teachers recognise that they cannot just drive through the plan; they need to be sensitive to the young person's circumstances. Teachers and mentors encourage students to be active learners by asking questions, working collaboratively and seeking support when needed during and after lessons.

Things to consider

This list is not exhaustive and is intended to indicate possible areas for development which will have an impact on the attainment and progress of looked after young people:

- the extent to which the PEP identifies barriers to learning and strategies for overcoming these;
- the current range of interventions used to support looked after young people, including the appropriateness of one-to-one tuition; and
- whether the progress of looked after young people is tracked sufficiently closely and if actions and resulting impact are critically evaluated.



2. Balancing high levels of support with real challenge

Why is this important?

Looked after young people often will have underachieved in their previous education. They may not see school as a priority in their lives, either currently or in the future. They will often have low self-esteem and lack confidence. Whilst they need care and understanding of their circumstances and how these can influence their learning, they also thrive if provided with appropriate challenge. They are often very vulnerable in a school environment and can be easily 'knocked down' by their peers and by teachers, making some 'tread carefully'. Their progress can be fragile; a successful day at school being eclipsed by a traumatic event at home. So, getting the right balance between support and challenge is crucial. There is a risk that teachers expect too little of the young people, not recognising the importance of challenge in building self-esteem and improving their educational achievement.

What these schools do

- **Secure high expectations of involvement in learning, progress and behaviour**

Looked after young people are expected to make good progress – their circumstances are not seen as a reason for not doing so, but rather an imperative to make a difference. Teachers regularly articulate what they want and expect them to achieve. Staff are aware that the young people may sometimes exhibit inappropriate behaviour to gain attention but awareness is not confused with acceptance and expectations remain high as teachers are not diverted from the focus on teaching and learning.

'I ask teachers to be careful but to always challenge and encourage'. (Headteacher)

'The school has such belief in J, no matter how difficult he is'. (Foster carer)

- **Support students in working productively with others**

Teachers provide opportunities in all lessons for paired and group discussion and collaborative work. They support and engender productive learning partnerships by careful grouping of students.

'It's fascinating to listen to the ideas of other pupils and to talk to them about my own ideas'. (Year 8 boy)

'My English teacher moved me to sit next to a grade A student and that has really helped. He has become my friend. I can talk to him about my work'. (Year 11 girl)

- **Regularly review targets**

The PEP is regularly reviewed to check whether current targets continue to be sufficiently challenging. Teachers have high expectations of what every young person can achieve and communicate these clearly to the students. They understand how fragile each young person's progress can be and the impact of events and changing circumstances in their home life, but they do not give up.

'The teachers never give up on you, even when you feel like giving up yourself. They always want you to do better'. (Year 11 girl)

- **Ensure mentors support academic as well as personal and emotional needs**

In most schools, the mentoring role encompasses support and challenge for academic progress as well as emotional and behavioural development. Mentors work closely with the young person, including involving them in discussing issues and agreeing solutions as much as possible. While providing strong mentoring support, these schools are also focused on supporting the young person towards increasing independence.

'My mentor has helped me with homework and classwork. She has helped me to be more organised. I now keep a copy of my timetable at home and in my pocket'. (Year 9 girl)

'My mentor pushes me in a nice way. Sometimes I need that'. (Year 11 girl)

Camden School for Girls, Camden

The learning mentors keep in contact with subject teachers when there are signs that the young person's progress is stalling. They discuss obstacles and ways forward and use their contact time to support the student.

Willenhall School, Walsall

The pupils meet with their form tutor to discuss causes and actions for any underachievement. Pupils are then expected to take responsibility for any agreed actions, for example setting up a meeting with a subject teacher for intervention support. The designated teacher works behind the scenes to ensure the process works for the looked after young people.

Tewkesbury School, Gloucestershire

The Learning Support Department provides well focused support for looked after young people, but also incorporates a planned programme of self-help strategies, including developing resilience so they can be 'weaned off' the more protected environment.

Things to consider

This list is not exhaustive and is intended to indicate possible areas for development which will have an impact on the attainment and progress of looked after young people:

- the current expectations for progress across a year and key stage;
- best practice in dealing with inappropriate behaviours;
- opportunities (with support when necessary) for the young people to take part in appropriate group work to facilitate learning; and
- the extent to which the review of progress ensures that targets remain challenging.



3. Skilfully linking each looked after young person to a key person they will relate well to

Why is this important?

These young people often have a history of special people leaving them and losing contact with close family members. Many do not trust adults. When in care, many young people have several changes of foster carers and social workers. School may be the first place that provides a consistent, long term relationship with an adult who will focus on their personal, emotional and academic needs.

What these schools do

- **Hand pick an adult to act as a confidant and advocate for the young person**

Almost all looked after young people have a mentor who they meet with regularly to talk through any issues or concerns – or just to have regular contact. Mentors have various roles in the schools: designated teacher, form tutor, a member of the office staff, head of year, specialist learning mentor, personal mentor, a teacher. The significant thing for the young people is that it is a person they respect, trust and like. Many have worked in the school for a long time. In some schools this could be an LA member of staff who visits the school on a regular basis. The designated teacher often ‘engineers’ this contact in such a way that the young person feels they made their own choice.

‘For me it’s been important to have someone I can trust. Someone I can open up to when I need to’.
(Year 11 girl)

‘I’ve worked with a Year 9 student since the beginning of Year 7. That’s important – we know and trust each other’. (Key worker)

- **Provide opportunities for the young person to have regular and easy contact with their mentor**

This is seen as a priority and is facilitated by a flexible approach that will, for example, provide access to the key person through a ‘drop in’ arrangement. A ‘haven’ or ‘listening post’ is often made available to the young people to allow them to take time out, reflect and on some occasions to calm down.

‘I know who to go to if I am upset or if I want to talk about a particular problem’. (Year 10 girl)

- **Provide regular contact with other young people who act as role models**

Providing access to role models can be very influential for looked after young people. Typically these are looked after young people who have made the most of their time in school, benefitted from out of hours learning or progressed to higher or further education.

‘They know the families and can build relationships with the students that are different from a teacher pupil relationship’.
(Designated teacher)

‘I can relate to my youth adviser. She is not a teacher, she is young and understands me. She has really helped me to think differently about my future’. (Year 11 girl)

Camden School for Girls, Camden

Each looked after young person meets with their learning mentor for 40 minutes every week. These meetings are used according to need: talking through changes and anxieties; helping with homework; discussing actions to improve achievement.

St Hild's Church of England School, Hartlepool

'Key workers' who are often teaching assistants, support pupils through their secondary education, providing one-to-one mentoring during the school day focusing on social and emotional support. They respond to need; one boy received up to four sessions a week, while another student was 'lighter touch'.

Quinton Kynaston School, Westminster

Four Youth Advisers, mostly ex-students working during a gap year act as role models for the looked after young people. The school trains and supervises the Youth Advisers and pair with each looked after young person carefully taking account of personality and need. The school provides 45 minutes of one-to-one meetings each week.

Things to consider

This list is not exhaustive and is intended to indicate possible areas for development which will have an impact on the attainment and progress of looked after young people:

- the extent to which each looked after young person has ready access to the support of a 'key person';
- the opportunities for looked after young people to have contact with positive role models;
- the opportunities and facilities available for looked after young people to take 'time out' or to access a 'listening post' or 'haven'; and
- the effectiveness of current communication between the designated teacher and key person and their roles and involvement in the process of the statutory review of the PEP section of the young person's care plan.



4. Making it a priority to know the looked after young person well and to build strong relationships

Why is this important?

Many looked after young people have significant periods of time when they have a great deal of uncertainty in their lives. Difficulties with relationships can trigger emotional trauma that might reveal itself through extreme behaviours or withdrawal. Awareness of potentially difficult situations and possible changes to circumstances helps schools to provide the support needed and lessen any negative impact on learning.

What these schools do

- **Put the designated teacher at the centre of communication**

Designated teachers find ways, without breaching confidentiality, of ensuring that the teachers of looked after young people are aware of their needs and times when they should be particularly watchful and supportive. They plan for regular, low profile, informal contact with each young person.

'The teachers can read the signals. They seem to know when it's best to give me some space and when I need to talk'. (Year 11 boy)

Brownhills Community Technology College, Walsall

The designated teacher makes sure she has an 'informal' one-to-one conversation with each looked after young person every week. This is often at lunchtime.

'I'll say 'bring your sandwich along to my office today so we can catch up'. They always come'. (Designated teacher)

- **Show a genuine interest and do the small, thoughtful things**

The mentor shows a genuine interest in all aspects of the young person's involvement in school, for example attending events and performances that the looked after young person participates in. They do the small, thoughtful things, like providing a Year 7 pupil with a pencil case with useful equipment for lessons or giving a Year 11 student a pack of towels and bed linen as a gift on his move into a residential care home.

St Hild's Church of England School, Hartlepool

The mentors of looked after young people attend events such as school plays if the young person is a participant and keeps press cuttings and photographs in a folder just like a parent would do.

- **Look for the signs and intervene early**

All behavioural incidents involving a looked after young person are recorded, however trivial they might appear. If a pattern starts to emerge this is then shared with the designated teacher and discussed with the young person. In addition, designated teachers and mentors use their local knowledge and networks and are perceptive in identifying the early signs of vulnerability so they can start developing supportive relationships, sometimes before young people are taken into care.

Things to consider

This list is not exhaustive and is intended to indicate possible areas for development which will have an impact on the attainment and progress of looked after young people:

- the frequency and quality of communication between the designated teacher and other staff;
- the procedures in place for monitoring and reporting behavioural incidents involving looked after young people; and
- whether mentors have opportunities to show a genuine interest in the young person.



5. Developing strong partnerships with carers, local authorities and specialist agencies

Why is this important?

Many looked after young people face considerable challenges in achieving high standards in school, and yet education is fundamentally their pathway to future success. A large number of different agencies have a key role in caring for each looked after young person. Coherence and consistency of approach of each of these teams is crucial to ensure that everyone is working collaboratively to secure the best educational outcomes for each young person. Essentially this is wrapping a team around the young person to ensure holistic support. The link between the school and the carer is particularly pivotal. Regular contact between the school and the carer is often vital in building a joint understanding of the young person's needs and the approaches that are likely to meet with success. It is especially important for teachers and carers to understand how to work together to tackle the particular traits and obstacles which limit the young person's capacity to learn when in school.

What these schools do

- **Work in genuine partnership with foster carers**

Designated teachers and mentors work closely with foster carers, particularly during challenging periods, for example when the student is experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties. Foster carers often talked about the gains from being able to have close and frequent contact with the adult who mentored the student they cared for, via telephone, text message or email, communicating the positives as well as any areas of concern. Contact is often focused on finding solutions to problems and agreeing actions to ensure consistent messages for the young person.

'I feel I work with the school. We communicate daily when we need to – and that is never a problem. I know what is going on'. (Foster carer)

'Contact between school and home is vital – and not just at crisis points'. (Designated teacher)

'We work hard to make sure we are speaking with one voice. We work together'. (Foster carer)

'Consistency of expectations is very important. I work closely with the carer to ensure we are consistent. We don't want any mixed messages'. (Mentor – Head of Year)

- **Ensure purposeful and focused contact with local authorities and support agencies**

Headteachers and designated teachers ensure effective and timely collaborative work between key professionals. They have regular dialogue with social workers and LA staff which is not limited to the six monthly care plan review meeting. Mentors are fully involved in significant meetings. In LAs with a virtual head and dedicated support staff their expertise and advice is sought as and when necessary. Headteachers and designated teachers really value having a named person as their contact with the virtual school.

*'I know her {the virtual head} and know she will give quick, good advice when I need it'.
(Designated teacher)*

Acland Burghley School, Camden

The 'Inclusion group' consists of key professionals who meet each week to focus on the students most in need. It is a problem solving group that makes decisions on actions to support looked after young people.

*'We have everyone in the room at the same time. We discuss the young people we judge need our help urgently. It means we can respond to difficulties immediately and coherently'.
(Designated teacher)*

Things to consider

This list is not exhaustive and is intended to indicate possible areas for development which will have an impact on the attainment and progress of looked after young people:

- the opportunities for carers to have easy contact and to work productively with school staff;
- additional strategies for helping carers to support their young person's learning; and
- the effectiveness of communication between the school and the full range of agencies that can support the young person.



6. Making things happen and seeing things through

Why is this important?

Many looked after young people feel they have little control over their lives and, for some, their experiences from the past tell them not to trust adults. They may show impatience and frustration if their difficulties and issues are not dealt with quickly. Listening, being responsive and seeing things through are important for gaining the trust of looked after young people, and, very importantly, ensuring they achieve the best educational outcomes possible.

What these schools do

- **Work at building trust**

Designated teachers and mentors are proactive, but subtle in their support and the young people know they will always do what they say. They show a genuine interest in each young person and support them during difficult periods.

'If I have a problem I know I can go to Mrs P and she will help me sort it out'. (Year 9 boy)

'Her mentor saw her through a series of unstable foster placements – now she's stable with a foster family and doing well'. (Designated teacher)

'Mrs T is a good support. She listens and will do what she says'. (Year 10 boy)

- **Act as an advocate for the young person to secure high achievement**

Designated teachers and mentors chase the progress of each looked after young person. They ask the difficult questions of teachers and mediate when there are concerns, often doing the things a parent would do for their child. They see themselves as an advocate for the young person and will negotiate for extra support, or different strategies when needed. They do everything they can to help the young person make the best of their opportunities.

'Our learning mentors have status in the school. Their recommendations are taken very seriously'. (Designated teacher)

'When I was younger, I used to ask my mentor to mediate for me when I was having difficulties in some lessons. I didn't want to do it myself. Now I can and do'. (Year 11 girl)

'I know there is always someone to talk to at school. I get all the support I need here. The teachers stand up for me and it has really helped to build my confidence'. (Year 11 student)

'My mentor and foster mum both pushed me to go to extra maths after school so I could get higher than the C grade I was predicted. I didn't want to go. I'm so pleased they did – I'm on track for a grade A now'. (Year 11 girl)

- **Act as an intermediary to secure support for emotional difficulties**

The designated teacher utilises every available source of support from outside agencies and knows who to contact to meet a young person's specific needs. They work closely with LA teams to provide appropriate and timely access to therapy.

'My therapy has helped me to think about things from a different perspective'. (Year 11 girl)

Things to consider

This list is not exhaustive and is intended to indicate possible areas for development which will have an impact on the attainment and progress of looked after young people:

- the capacity to be able to respond very quickly to urgent situations;
- how mentors mediate to secure the best support for learning for the young people; and
- awareness of the full range of support that is available through outside agencies.



7. Ensuring consistency as well as discrete flexibility

Why is this important?

There is no 'typical' looked after young person. They are highly individual – each with their own needs, special likes and strong dislikes. Their backgrounds and family circumstances also vary. Some are refugees and have had little or no education prior to arriving in the UK. For many, previous and continued sporadic emotional trauma and chaotic lifestyles can be revealed through unacceptable behaviours in the school environment. Some will push boundaries, some will try to get others to reject them. These behaviours make them at greater risk of fixed-term or permanent exclusion. It is important to be aware that nationally, looked after young people are more likely to be permanently excluded than other pupils. Looked after young people often need tailored intervention to address their gaps in learning and obstacles to progress and to support their social and emotional development. However, consistency is important and the looked after young people want to be treated the same as all the pupils in their class. They, more than most young people, require particular understanding and flexibility when their response or behaviour falls below acceptable levels.

What these schools do

- **Avoid exclusion**

Teachers and other staff exercise flexibility in a discrete and subtle way. There are no overt signs that all young people would see to indicate that differential treatment was being offered to a looked after young person. The differentiation is often achieved in one-to-one situations with the young person and not in front of the whole class. Fixed-term and permanent exclusion are not considered as viable options.

'Exclusion is just another form of rejection. They don't need it'. (Designated teacher)

Dyke House School, Hartlepool

The school worked closely with Hartlepool local authority to devise bespoke packages for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion. Together they developed a package combining off-site training, team building at an outdoor centre and one-to-one tuition at an LA centre for a looked after pupil at risk of permanent exclusion.

Swavesey Village College, Cambridgeshire

The school will not permanently exclude any looked after student. If necessary they use their 'inclusion centre' for internal exclusion.

'We pride ourselves at keeping hold of them'. (Designated teacher)

- **Constantly tailor provision to meet the current needs of the student**

Designated teachers coordinate, monitor and evaluate tailored intervention to support the needs of the individual. Many schools use specialist learning units to give the young people focused support in addressing significant gaps in their education and develop learning skills, including moving to greater independence and working effectively with others. Students are carefully assessed and programmes adapted according to need. The transition from the more 'protected' environment of a small unit to mainstream classes is carefully planned and often implemented gradually.

Bishopsford School, Merton

They have developed a special unit for refugee pupils called 'The Link'. The unit is staffed by two teachers and can support up to 20 students. The main focus is on teaching and learning English, but students are also supported in the move to mainstream classes. Students also attend confidence building activities such as an outward bound course in the Lake District. The approach is very flexible so that students can move in and out of The Link until they are completely comfortable with the school environment.

'The teachers are very helpful. You can ask them questions and they are available all the time if you need extra help'. (Year 11 student working in The Link)

The Dukeries Community College, Nottinghamshire

'The White House' provides an alternative curriculum experience for pupils, including some looked after young people. It is described as a 'sanctuary' in the school, but specialist staff focus on developing life skills and enhancing learning.

Things to consider

This list is not exhaustive and is intended to indicate possible areas for development which will have an impact on the attainment and progress of looked after young people:

- staff development focused on how flexibility can be achieved without the appearance of favouritism;
- finding viable alternatives to fixed-term and permanent exclusions for looked after young people; and
- providing small group support and development when needed.



8. Actively extending the horizons of each young person

Why is this important?

Many looked after young people have difficulty in making and keeping friends. Some have difficulties in trusting others, and some are reluctant to develop friendships that might leave them susceptible to rejection. Looked after young people are often described by their teachers and carers as having low levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. Opportunities to develop hobbies and interests can have a significant impact for these young people. Shared interests extend social contact and provide a different purpose for interaction which helps build self-confidence and, for many, strengthen social skills. This can act as a catalyst to adopting a more positive approach to school and learning.

What these schools do

- **Ensure mentors encourage students to develop their own interests**

Designated teachers give mentors a key role in discussing interests and hobbies with their mentees and actively encouraging them to participate in events and join after school clubs and activities. They look for ways to fund extra curricular activities for looked after young people and support any necessary changes to travel arrangements to secure their regular attendance. Specific actions to support the development of interests are often incorporated into the PEP.

St Hild's Church of England School, Hartlepool

Mentors prioritise their looked after young people for lead involvement in planning and supporting charity and community events.

*'I take every opportunity to involve her in events'.
(Mentor)*

Brownhills Community Technology College, Walsall

The school secured outreach funding for two looked after young people to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Both students had achieved bronze and were working for the silver award.

- **Link rewards to existing or potential interests**

Some schools reward hard work with access to a different range of activities.

The Dukeries Community College, Nottinghamshire

Two looked after young people were rewarded with a morning of climbing at an activity centre following their efforts with GCSE revision.

Things to consider

This list is not exhaustive and is intended to indicate possible areas for development which will have an impact on the attainment and progress of looked after young people:

- the level of involvement in out of hours learning; and
- how mentors can extend the participation of looked after young people in activities to increase social contact and build self-confidence.

9. Planning for future transitions

Why is this important?

Change can be difficult for many pupils. For looked after children and young people, transfer from one school to the next can be particularly daunting and may mean developing new relationships with foster carers as well as with a new mentor and others in school. Schools need to prepare carefully for these transitions. Typically looked after young people benefit from thorough preparation and a gradual, staged introduction to new situations and circumstances. Security is everything to them and a new situation might be viewed as destabilising and a significant threat.

Looked after young people are less likely to aspire to further and higher education and in some cases may not receive sufficient encouragement to do so. Yet securing their progress and academic achievement is crucial for their future success and well being. Pupils will have a wide range of abilities and will need access to a range of appropriate pathways post-16. Some pupils will need more time to secure good GCSE qualifications, including English and mathematics to pave their way to further and then higher education. Schools, working collaboratively with foster carers, have a key role in helping these young people to aim high.

What these schools do

- **Prioritise the needs of looked after students at key points in their education**

Most of the schools prioritised the looked after young people at key points in their education, for example in option choices for Key Stage 4 courses, in finding work experience placements.

- **Carefully manage transfer from primary to secondary school**

Most schools provide additional support to Year 6 looked after pupils in preparation for their transfer to secondary school. The induction programme is carefully planned and more comprehensive than that experienced by other pupils. Looked after children make additional visits to the secondary school and are usually accompanied by their class teacher or teaching assistant. Typically, several visits are organised so that the child is able to get to know key staff and acclimatise to the new situation and surroundings. In some schools, mentoring links are established with a pupil from the new school and contact is offered during the summer holiday.

The transfer process is very important. We want to have strategies in place as soon as the child enters Year 7'. (Designated teacher)

Acland Burghley School, Camden

The designated teacher and learning support team link each looked after child to a peer mentor during the summer term prior to transfer. Year 8 pupils volunteer for the peer mentoring programme during the summer term and are trained by specialist staff. All Year 6 looked after children do an additional visit to the school in the summer term, before the primary school visits. They meet with their peer mentor during this additional visit, who shows them around the school and works with them on induction activities. The peer mentor then joins the Year 7 pupils' tutor group for the first day of term and then weekly to work with and support the looked after young person.

St Hild's Church of England School, Hartlepool

The key worker who will be the mentor of the looked after child from Year 7 regularly visits the child in their primary school during the summer term and starts the process of collecting the wealth of information from the adults who know the child well. Also the Year 6 teacher of each looked after child visits the secondary school with the child each week for six weeks in the summer term.

- **Link the young people to positive role models to raise their aspirations**

Some schools provide business mentors and youth advisers specifically to raise aspirations of pupils, including looked after young people.

'It's really important for H to look to the future and I think she does that now. She knows now that she does have choices'. (Youth adviser)

Ursuline High School, Merton

All students have access to a business mentor from Year 9. They meet weekly to support organisational and study skills, help with homework and discuss future opportunities.

- **Do everything they can to keep the young people in education and aiming high**

Many 11-19 schools guaranteed looked after young people a sixth form place and strongly encouraged further education to strengthen and extend academic qualifications. The schools started discussing FE and HE aspirations early with the young people, and ensured these were always part of the PEP review.

'The school has guaranteed T a place in the sixth form even before he gets his results. It's given him a massive boost'. (Foster carer)

Things to consider

This list is not exhaustive and is intended to indicate possible areas for development which will have an impact on the attainment and progress of looked after young people:

- procedures to smooth the transfer between classes within the school;
- procedures to smooth the transition for looked after young people between schools and further/higher education; and
- using strategies to raise aspirations and ease the routes to further and higher education.



Annex 1

Self evaluation: Support for looked after young people

Section A: Initial Review					
1 = very effective					
4 = in need of development					
How effective are your current approaches in the following aspects of support for looked after young people?	1	2	3	4	
1. Doing the things they do for all young people but more so					
The extent to which the PEP identifies barriers to learning and strategies for overcoming these					
The current range of interventions used to support looked after young people, including the appropriateness of one-to-one tuition					
Whether the progress of looked after young people is tracked sufficiently closely and if actions and resulting impact are critically evaluated					
2. Balancing high level support with real challenge					
The current expectations for progress across a year and key stage					
Practice in dealing with inappropriate behaviours					
Opportunities (with support when necessary) for the young people to take part in appropriate group work to facilitate learning					
The extent to which the review of progress ensures that targets remain challenging					
3. Skilfully linking each young person to a key person they relate well to					
The extent to which each looked after young person has ready access to the support of a 'key person'					
The opportunities for looked after young people to have contact with positive role models					

Section A: Initial Review					
1 = very effective					
4 = in need of development		1	2	3	4
The opportunities and facilities available for looked after young people to take 'time out' or to access a 'listening post' or 'haven'					
The communication between the designated teacher and the key person and their roles and involvement in the process of the statutory review of the PEP section of young person's care plan					
4. Making it a priority to know the young people well and to build strong relationships					
The frequency and quality of communication between the designated teacher and other staff					
The procedures in place for monitoring and reporting incidents involving looked after young people					
Whether mentors have opportunities to show a genuine interest in the young person					
5. Developing strong partnerships with carers, local authorities and specialist agencies					
The opportunities for carers to have easy contact and to work productively with school staff					
Additional strategies for helping carers to support their young person's learning					
The effectiveness of communication between the school and the full range of agencies that can support the young person					
6. Making things happen and seeing things through					
The capacity to be able to respond very quickly to urgent situations					
How mentors mediate to secure the best support for learning for the young people					
Awareness of the full range of support that is available through outside agencies					

Section A: Initial Review

1 = very effective				
4 = in need of development	1	2	3	4
7. Ensuring consistency as well as discrete flexibility				
Staff development focused on how flexibility can be achieved without the appearance of favouritism				
Finding viable alternatives to fixed-term and permanent exclusions for the young people				
Providing small group support and development when needed				
8. Actively extending the horizons of each young person				
The level of involvement in out of hours learning				
How mentors can extend the participation of looked after young people in activities to increase social contact and build self-confidence				
9. Planning for future transitions				
Procedures to smooth the transfer between classes within the school				
Procedures to smooth transition between schools and further/ higher education				
Using strategies to raise aspirations and ease the routes to further and higher education				

Section B: Priorities for development

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Annex 2

The DCSF would like to thank the Local Authorities, headteachers and staff of the following 17 schools for providing such a rich insight into the way they successfully support looked after young people.

Sir Harry Smith Community School, Cambridgeshire

Swavesey Village College, Cambridgeshire

Acland Burghley School, Camden

Camden School for Girls, Camden

Tewkesbury School, Gloucestershire

Farmor's School, Gloucestershire

Christ College, Gloucestershire

Dyke House School, Hartlepool

St Hild's Church of England Voluntary Aided School, Hartlepool

Bishopsford School, Merton

Ursuline High School, Merton

The Dukeries Community College, Nottinghamshire

The Brunts School, Nottinghamshire

Brownhills Community Technology College, Walsall

Willenhall School Sports College, Walsall

St Marylebone Church of England School, Westminster

Quintin Kynaston School, Westminster

Annex 3

Methodology

Each school was visited by a DCSF school standards adviser for up to a day during May and June 2009. During the visit discussions were held with:

- Headteacher and senior leaders
- Designated teacher
- Key people who support and mentor looked after young people
- Foster carers

And most importantly:

- Looked after young people

The purpose of the investigation was to ascertain best practice in schools to improve the progress and attainment of looked after young people. Discussions explored the strategies and actions of senior leaders, teachers and mentors that make a difference to looked after young people: in the classroom, through support and mentoring and through additionality. Foster carers gave their views on how the school helps them to help their child as well as the actions that help raise the attainment of the young people they care for.

The schools had between two and twenty-one looked after young people on roll at the time of the visit, although numbers in all schools fluctuated. Some young people preferred to meet individually with the school standards adviser, while others were happy to have discussions in small groups. Overall, discussions were held with about 50 young people. In most schools, the school standards adviser also met with the foster carers of many of the young people.

Annex 4

The performance of looked after young people

Looked after young people are one of the lowest attaining groups nationally, and the gap between all pupils' attainment and the attainment of young people in care widens further as pupils move through secondary education.

In 2008 there were 43 700 children who had been looked after continuously for at least twelve months by English local authorities (LAs). 33 000 were of school age and of these 28% had SEN statements, 12% missed at least 25 days of school, and 0.5% received a permanent exclusion. In 2008:

- 46% of looked after children achieved a Level 4 or higher in English at the end of Key Stage 2, compared to 81% of all children. In 2000, the proportion for looked after children was 32%.
- 44% of looked after children achieved a Level 4 or higher in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2, compared to 79% of all children. In 2000, the proportion for looked after children was 30%.
- 43% of looked after young people achieved five or more GCSEs at A* – G, compared to 92% of all young people. In 2000, the proportion for looked after young people was 36%.
- 14% of looked after young people achieved five or more GCSEs at A* – C, compared to 65% of all young people. In 2000, the proportion for looked after young people was 7%.



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