

A better education for children in care

The issues



OFFICE OF THE
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER



Social
Exclusion
Unit



'Children in care'

The term 'children in care' is used in this guide to mean all children and young people who are looked after by a local authority in accordance with the Children Act 1989. Children and young people who are, for example, looked after by local authorities on a series of agreed short-term placements or sentenced to local authority secure units, are not specifically addressed in this document. However, some of the examples of good practice will also be relevant to them.

Content Page

Children in Care Fact Sheets

1. Access to School

2. Early Years

3. Health

4. Out of School

5. Post 16

6. Support in Education

7. Support at Home

8. Target

ACCESS TO SCHOOL

The issues

- Most children in care of compulsory school age are in stable places in mainstream schools. A significant minority – thought to be around one in four – are educated in non mainstream settings or at home
- Figures show that over one in 10 miss 25 or more days of schooling a year⁽¹⁾.
- Children in care are vulnerable to missing out on education, even though most want to be in school. They can miss school because
 - they do not have a school place;
 - they have been excluded; or
 - they do not attend.

Local authorities can find it difficult to find school places for children in care for a variety of reasons.

Some schools can be unwilling to take children in care, assuming they will have behavioural difficulties and poor attainment.

Bursaries for children in care: Dorset

Dorset provides local schools with an annual £500 bursary for each child in care which funds additional provision in accordance with the individual child's needs. Funds have been used to pay for a wide range of support including music lessons, books on medical conditions (to help the foster carers understand what support the child needed), extra tuition and in one case, a computer. Schools spend the money in consultation with the child, carers and social workers, with decisions recorded in the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP). Bursaries of this sort improve schools' confidence in their ability to meet children's educational needs and they may be more willing to admit children in care as a result.

In Dorset, the bursaries are funded through the local education budget. The allocation given to schools is based on annual census data and is identified in the school's annual budget statement.

School Admissions Code of Practice

The new School Admissions Code of Practice (published in January 2003) identifies children in care as a 'disadvantaged group' with poor education outcomes. In recognition of the difficulties that children in care can face in finding appropriate school placements, the Code of Practice recommends that admission authorities give children in care top priority in their oversubscription criteria.

The Code of Practice also recommends that local admission forums take account of the needs of vulnerable groups, including children in care who are looking for a school place outside of the normal admissions cycle. Forums should monitor how well these arrangements are working. The Department of Education and Skills will be issuing guidance to local admission forums regarding the issues that need to be addressed for children in care when developing admission protocols.

Copy of admissions guide: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sacode/docs/DFES-School%20Admissions.pdf>

Advice on school admissions appeals from the Advisory Centre for Education can be found at:

<http://www.ace-ed.org.uk/appeals/index.html>

Bursaries can be used in other ways too. Schemes in Leeds and Knowsley are also supporting the education of children in care.

Targeted bursary schemes

Leeds operate a bursary scheme for children in care who are on the verge of exclusion. Around 10-15 children are supported each year, with one-off payments of up to £3000 made to the child's school for additional support. In one case funding was used to pay for a lunchtime supervisor for a child who persistently ran away, in others the funding has been used to pay for additional tuition. Children in need of additional support in school are identified by carers, schools and social workers in consultation with the Education Support Team, which is based in the local Social Service Department. To date, none of the children who have been helped by the scheme have been excluded from school.

Knowsley also operates a bursary scheme, which supports children with educational and behavioural difficulties – a number of whom are in care. Bursaries of between £3000 – £5000 per year, are paid to schools and used to purchase additional provision in line with each child's needs, for example one to one classroom support.

School exclusions and truancy put extra pressure on care placements. They can contribute to placement breakdown adding to the instability that characterises the lives of a significant minority of children in care.

Tackling exclusion and truancy: Dorset

The **Royal Manor Arts College in Portland** has developed an inclusion policy that has resulted in a fall in exclusions. In the year preceding its introduction there were seven exclusions. In the five years it has been in place, there has been an average of one exclusion per year.

The school has a successful behaviour monitoring strategy for children causing concern, with individual targets for behaviour improvement. Children can use a 'behaviour pass' if they feel a need to leave the class because they are upset or angry. The school also has a behaviour centre to act as a buffer between college discipline structures and fixed term exclusions. It also is used as a point of return for students who have been temporarily excluded from school.

References

- 1 Department of Health/National Statistics, *Social Services Performance Assessment Framework Indicators 2001-2002* (London, DH/NS, 2002). 12 per cent of children in care for a year or more, missed at least 25 days of school for any reason during the previous school year.

EARLY YEARS

The issues

- Engaging children in learning from a young age is vital if they are to have the best start in life. Children in care can be behind in learning even by age five.
- Socialising with their peers at playgroup or nursery is an important part of pre-school children's development.
- Without additional support, children in care may not access and benefit from pre-school provision and learning.

Pre-school Personal Education Plans: Somerset

Following a review in 2001 of early years provision for children in care, Somerset has extended the procedures and practices which support the education of school age children in care, to those in care from birth to entry into reception class.

Education and Social Services Departments worked together to develop a Personal Education Plan (PEP) specifically designed for younger children. As with the school PEP, the document encourages continuity and stability of provision, early identification of special educational needs and a smooth planned transition into school. The PEP may include information on early learning, access to play opportunities, appropriate pre-school provision and support and individual learning targets. Carers are encouraged and trained to support the development of very young children using a set of materials called 'Learning Together' which focus on raising self-esteem and early communication skills. Children in care also have access to Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) materials, which support early learning, in areas where Sure Start groups are established.

The social worker is responsible for initiating the Pre-School PEP process and subsequent reviews which should be completed in consultation with the child, carers, parents, Foundation Stage Advisors (FSAs) and other key professionals. FSAs have the same responsibilities for pre school children as designated teachers in schools and are supported by the Children Looked After Education Team who are based in the local authority. FSAs provide additional support for children in care with special educational needs developing a School Entry Plan to ensure that they make an effective transition to school – this is incorporated into the PEP. Planning starts in February in preparation for school entry in September.

"One of the most significant hurdles we had to overcome when introducing early years PEPs, was lack of knowledge about the care system among early years practitioners and, vice versa, lack of knowledge about early years development and education among social workers and carers."

Detailed guidance has been written and copies sent to those involved in the pre-school PEP process. Extensive training has been offered to key groups including fosters carers, Social Services Area Managers, and field social workers, FSAs and Resource Managers. Although training needs are being addressed, the most significant barrier to the widespread use of pre-school PEPs continues to be their relative low importance, compared to other competing priorities social workers have to contend with.

For more information, contact Shirley Zaple from Somerset CLA (Education) Team, telephone 01935 476130 Email: szaple@somerset.gov.uk

The Government has introduced initiatives for all pre-school children from which children in care can benefit, including:

- Providing nursery places for three and four year olds;
- Sure Start local programmes to improve the health and well being of families and children aged 0-3 in the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

A new approach was adopted in Brighton and Hove when it was recognised that carers and social workers sometimes lacked information about local childcare provision or were not fully aware of the importance of pre-school learning.

Brighton and Hove Sure Start made a concerted effort to provide services for children in care. Children living away from home – either in foster care, with extended family or with adopters – would generally receive an enhanced service, particularly in the early stages of a placement. This includes additional support from health visitors and greater access to multi-disciplinary services as appropriate.

The team block-purchases 30 places at local nurseries for two to 2½ year-olds that are specifically for children receiving enhanced services, although there is a small waiting list for these places.

Approximately 25 per cent of families with young children move within the Sure Start area each year. When families are re-housed outside the area, the team continues to work with them until they are linked into services in their new location. This includes foster carers who have moved, and children who have moved to a new placement outside the area. **For further information contact: Stephen Bell on 01273 320900**

Other authorities have also taken steps to support early learning among children in care...

In **Tameside**, carers are encouraged to support the learning of very young children using development packs, which focus on early communication and listening skills. This helps to ensure that children in care have the basic skills that they need to participate fully in early years provision and education.

To find out about take up of early years provision among children in care, the Quality Protects Education Team in **Leeds** collect data on whether their three and four year-olds are accessing that provision. Currently all of them are attending appropriate provision.

HEALTH

The issues

- Educational outcomes can be strongly influenced by a child's health.
- Most children in care have experienced some kind of trauma. Just under half have been abused or neglected before coming into care, and all are from families experiencing difficult circumstances⁽¹⁾.
- Frequent placement moves can cause practical problems in meeting the health needs of children in care – for example problems may not be identified. Frequent moves can also delay assessment processes and the provision of support to meet a child's identified needs.
- Dedicated access routes to services or health provision can help to ensure that children in care get the support and care that they need.

Attending school can give children the chance to raise their self-confidence and self-esteem, participate in sports and access health and sex education – all of which will contribute to improving their health.

Therapeutic support: Leeds

Leeds Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST) provides therapeutic support to individual children and runs projects in schools on anger management, self-esteem and the transition to secondary school. The team works closely with other agencies as necessary, particularly where children are already receiving support from other organisations. In 2001, around 20 per cent of their cases involved children in care.

MAST was set up at the request of schools in the East Leeds area, who also part-fund the service. Staff are mainly drawn from education and social services, with specialist skills such as drama therapy or in-depth knowledge of special educational needs.

The **National Healthy School Standard** recognises that schools can play an important role in promoting health and emotional wellbeing for children especially those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.

The Government's plans to improve child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) are reflected by NHS planning priorities. The aim is to expand services by a minimum of 10 per cent year on year leading to nationwide availability of comprehensive CAMHS by 2006. This is backed up by significant new funding for CAMHS of £250m over the next three years. Detailed guidance on spending priorities for 2003/04 were issued by the Department of Health in January 2003 in the CAMHS Grant Circular (LAC(2003)2). More information will also be set out in the forthcoming Children's National Service Framework.

Research suggests that young people in care, particularly those in children's homes can have higher than average mental health needs.⁽²⁾

Dedicated gateways to mental health services, or provision dedicated to children in care, ensure they receive fast and effective access to the help that they need.

Dedicated mental health services for children in care: Dorset

The Dorset Connections project was set up with funding for two years from the Department of Health to work exclusively with looked after children. The initiative is one of 24 CAMHS Innovation Projects throughout the country. This service is intended for children and young people up to and including the age of 16 and offers individual therapeutic packages. This can include funding therapeutic leisure activities, such as horse riding as well as offering access to creative therapies. It is able to offer a significantly higher level of provision of services for children and young people with mental illness. Referrals are assessed far more quickly than under the local CAMHS service. Initial assessments are made within 14 days, although urgent referrals can be seen within 24 hours. An intervention package is developed within seven days of assessment.

- Carers reported significant improvements with positive social behaviour among young people involved in the project.
- 53 per cent of young people referred, had behaviour difficulties at school which were putting their education at risk. On leaving the project, this had reduced to 21 per cent.
- At referral, 31 per cent of young people were truanting. While involved in the Project this reduced to 11 per cent of young people.

The Government has recently published updated guidance on **Promoting the Health of Looked After Children**.⁽³⁾ The guidance states, for example, that:

- Every child should have a health assessment, covering mental and physical health needs, and health promotion when they come into care. A plan must be put in place for meeting these needs, which is to be reviewed annually (every six months for children aged between two and five).
- Each council must establish a protocol for sharing information about care placements and health, including ensuring that the relevant councils and Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are notified when children change care placement.
- Foster and residential carers have a responsibility to promote the health of children in their care.
- Chief executives of PCTs must treat the health of children in care as a local priority, and must identify a designated nurse and a designated doctor for children in care.
- Local drugs and teenage pregnancy strategies must take account of the needs of children in care.

References

- 1 Department of Health, *Children Looked After by Local Authorities – Year Ending 31 March 2001*, England (London, DH, 2001)
- 2 Dimigen G., Del Priore C., Butler S., Evans S., Ferguson L. and Swan M, **Psychiatric disorder among children at the time of entering local authority care: questionnaire survey**, *British Medical Journal*, 1999, 319, pp 675-675. See also McCann J. B., James A., Wilson S., and Dunn G., **Prevalence of psychiatric disorders in young people in the care system**, *British Medical Journal* 1996, 313, pp. 1529 – 30.
- 3 Department of Health, *Promoting the Health of Looked After Children* (London, DH, 2002).

ACCESS TO OUT OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

The issues

- Children's learning is not confined to the classroom and 'formal' education activities.
- Participation in youth work and out of school activities can make a considerable contribution to children's development.
- Involvement can also encourage young people who have experienced problems at school to re-engage with learning.
- Without appropriate support, children in care can often miss out on these opportunities.

Children in care can miss out on these opportunities for a number of reasons including:

- The cost of activities.
- Difficulties getting parental permission.
- Lack of transport – particularly in rural areas.

Improving access to out of school activities

To encourage greater participation, some local authorities have developed specific projects for children in care, often using Quality Protects funding and/or in co-operation with local charities, youth groups and voluntary organisations.

Examples include:

- **KANDU Arts, Wiltshire:** multi-media arts projects including theatre, dance and music. They also run week-long projects during school holidays that are aimed at specific age groups.
- **Q Arts, Derby:** exploring 'positive issues' such as self-image, identity and ambition, through participatory art, with artwork being shown in a public gallery.
- **Several authorities** (including Brighton and Hove, Knowsley, Sunderland and others) have discount cards, which give children in care free or reduced price access to local leisure services.

Access to libraries: Blackburn

The scheme aims to make library membership as straightforward as possible for children who may be moving around a lot. The special "Right to Read" ticket is given to short-term foster carers, for use by any child living in their household. It enables young people to borrow materials from local libraries and to access the ICT facilities. Individual library tickets are still encouraged where possible, with Right to Read tickets provided as an additional resource.

Mentoring can offer young people the chance to develop their self-confidence and discuss their current and future objectives or the chance to access activities outside of school.

Some schemes offer general support to all vulnerable children. Others offer a particular type of support or are aimed at certain groups of children and young people.

The **Prince's Trust Leaving Care Initiative** helps young people leaving care to access new experiences and opportunities.

The scheme has:

- Helped 6,000 young people over the last four years: 1,300 through mentoring, 3,800 on training courses, 850 through individual or group awards, and smaller numbers through travel, music and school clubs.
- Developed in partnership, a mentoring for care leavers' model with a set of national minimum standards, accredited training materials, and standardised evaluation.

For further information on Prince's Trust initiatives please call freephone: 0800 842 842 or visit: www.princes-trust.org.uk

Theatre Cap-a-pie, Co Durham

Cap-a-pie is a theatre group of professional artists working across the North East with young people who otherwise have given up on education, are at risk of school exclusion or find mainstream education provision unsuitable. The group provides theatre-based alternative education.

Cap-a-pie has had success in re-engaging young people in learning through drama and the arts. Such activities can offer disaffected young people the opportunity to develop confidence and social skills away from the playground. At the group's drama classes, young people also have the opportunity to participate in curriculum based learning, with some students, including children in care, returning to mainstream schooling with a new found confidence. Cap-a-pie now offers a GNVQ in performing arts.

The group works with a wide range of other organisations, for example schools, NHS trusts, the police and social services departments. In partnership with Sure Start Wear Valley, Cap-a-pie ran a scheme for pre-school children to improve toddlers' speech and language through drama.

Cap-a-pie receives funding from a number of organisations including central Government's Creative Partnerships programme, local authorities and businesses.

Contact Theatre Cap-a-pie on (01207) 571177

POST 16

The Issues

- Poor experiences of school can mean that care leavers do not see further or higher education as an option that is open to them.
- Take up of further and higher education courses and training opportunities is very low.⁽¹⁾
- Care leavers may need additional support to cope with the demands of student life while at the same time adjusting to living independently.
- With the appropriate support, young people who have experienced problems at school can be encouraged to re-engage with learning.
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which imposes new and stronger duties upon local authorities to support care leavers, is still in the early stages of implementation.

Higher Education Taster Courses

Both the University of Southampton and Warwick University have taken steps to encourage applications from care leavers.

Since 2000, the **University of Southampton** has run a residential six-day summer school for care leavers and young people from inner city areas who might not normally go to university. The summer school is targeted at year 11 pupils and aims to give them a taste of university life and to raise their expectations about future possibilities.

Whilst at the summer school, the young people stay in University halls of residence and take part in an academic programme of their choice such as science, engineering, social sciences or law and humanities. Sessions are designed to engage young people in the subject areas and include performances, competitions and group activities. The summer school also gives young people a chance to find out about graduate career opportunities as it includes visits to local organisations/ employers. University students help to run the programme and organise social activities to give participants the opportunity to sample the wider benefits of University life. Only the faculty leaders and the project manager know which young people are from care so that they are not stigmatised in the eyes of their fellow students. Young people have access to a student mentor if they have problems. Effective communication between social workers, schools and the University is needed so that staff are prepared to offer extra support for those young people that need it. Care leavers' participation has been funded by the Connexions Service, the local authority, or through grants from voluntary sector organisations.

In **Coventry** – although there have been some problems with wider children's services – innovative work has been going on to raise the aspirations of children in care. Working in partnership, the Education Service in Coventry and the **University of Warwick** have established a non-residential programme to give young people in care a taste of further and higher education. The activities on offer are tailored to meet the needs and interests of individual young people. Examples include dance and drama sessions, children's rights lectures, college open days and activity sessions, web design, cooking and food science, and an ecology study day.

The programme also seeks to improve understanding of further and higher education opportunities amongst foster carers and residential care workers – for those they care for, and for themselves.

Funding for the initial programme came from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and the work is continuing using mainstream funding from the Coventry and Warwickshire Connexions Service and Coventry Education Service.

A taste of work... can also help to raise the aspirations and expectations of children in care and care leavers. A number of authorities, including **Sefton** and **Bolton**, offer training and employment opportunities within the local authority to give young people an insight into the world of work.

Bolton provides six-month work experience placements for young people in care aged 16 and over. A dedicated worker spends time matching young people with suitable placements and is on hand to provide the young people with practical support throughout. Each young person is also allocated a workplace mentor who can provide day to day guidance as required. Training, support and assistance is also provided to line managers and work mentors involved in the scheme so that they have a good understanding of care leavers' needs.

As well as providing young people with an opportunity to earn money, gain confidence and valuable experience, the project has helped to develop a wider awareness of corporate parenting in the council's directorates.

Still a relatively new service, Connexions Partnerships are able to offer careers advice as well as work experience and training opportunities through schemes like Modern Apprenticeships. Good joined-up working between social services and Connexions will enable them to deliver an effective service to young people.

Joint working between Connexions and Leaving Care Services

Connexions Cornwall and Devon, one of the early Connexions pilots, have developed a Partnership Agreement with Social Services. The benefits of this joint approach include:

- joint ownership of targets aimed at helping care leavers succeed in their transition to working life and adulthood;
- minimal duplication and a more seamless service from the young person's point of view;
- more awareness of the services available to young people and how they may be accessed;
- an increase of trust between professionals and between young people and services providers.

As a result of this agreement, joint working is underway in Plymouth, where Connexions have placed a Personal Adviser into the Leaving Care Team.

As part of its Leaving Care programme, **Ealing** provides a range of services to ensure that university is accessible to children in care. A specialist teacher in Post 16 education offers advice on courses, interview preparation and help with UCAS application forms at the YESS (Youth, Education and Social Services) drop in centre. Life skills including budgeting and healthy eating are also provided so that young people are prepared for all aspects of university life. At university young people are provided with financial support of up to £5,000 per annum to cover subsistence and accommodation costs. In total, 9 per cent of care leavers are at university compared to a national average of 1 per cent. **For more information, contact Marcella Phelan, Quality Protects Manager, telephone 0208 825 8848**
Email: Phelanm@ealing.gov.uk

References

- 1 Department of Health/National Statistics, *Social Services Performance Assessment Framework Indicators 2001-2002*, (London, DH/NS, 2002). 46 per cent of young people aged 19 in 2001–2002 who were looked after by councils in their 17th year on 1 April 1999 were engaged in education, training, or employment at the age of 19; this was 53 per cent of the level for all young people aged 19 (86 per cent).

SUPPORT IN EDUCATION

The issues

- Children in care may need extra support in education. This can be because they have missed out on schooling or early years provision and need to catch up, or because they have specific support needs including special educational needs.
- Specific measures designed to support children in care at school, such as Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and Designated Teachers, alongside school's wider inclusion policies, have been most effective where there is close joint working among front line staff in social care and education.
- Lack of training and advice about what care is like and the reasons why children come into care mean that some teachers underestimate the academic potential of children in care.

Greenwich provide counsellors, support assistants and learning mentors; a high level support service in school which children in care, alongside other pupils having difficulties, can access.

Where necessary, children in care are encouraged to make full use of catch up provision on offer. This could take the form of extra support in the classroom, tuition after school, or additional support at weekends or in school holidays.

The language needs of unaccompanied asylum seeker children are met through the Cambridge Proficiency 1st and intermediate English Courses, which are run at school.

Education Liaison and Support Service (ELSS): Herefordshire

ELSS is a team of teachers, augmented by school based learning support assistants and its own dedicated administrative support. It provides a liaison and support service for Herefordshire children and young people in care aged 3-19 including an outreach service for children and young people placed outside the County.

ELSS has a dedicated database to monitor each child's progress and an attendance officer regularly collects and analyses individual attendance data. The team works closely with schools and social care staff, particularly in cases where school placements appear to be under pressure, to develop tailored packages of support.

The support ELSS provides is highly valued by local schools and social care staff. The team continues to evolve and develop and has recently recruited an early years teacher. The teacher with responsibility for young people aged over 11 has been seconded part-time to the Connexions Service to undertake Personal Advisor training and enhance inter-agency working.

Contact: the team leader – abushby@herefordshire.gov.uk

The Who Cares? Trust and the **National Literacy Association** ran a literacy project in conjunction with a large county council. Social workers and teachers were asked to refer children aged 8 – 13 with literacy problems to the project. As the first stage, the children – most of whom were in long term, stable foster care – were assessed by an educational psychologist (EP). Of the 66 children referred, the EP found that 19 actually had reading ages at or above the expected level; two 11 year olds had reading ages of 16, one 10 year old had a reading age of 15, and another of 17. Their apparent literacy problems had, in many cases, stemmed from boredom at being set unchallenging work. The local authority recognised that in many cases teachers and social workers had artificially low expectations of children’s abilities, and is now taking steps to address these expectations.

Designated teachers

The role of designated teacher is taken seriously at **Kingstone High School**. The deputy head responsible for pupil inclusion and support is also the designated teacher.

The designated teacher’s timetable has been assessed and developed to offer her the flexibility to fulfil the duties associated with the post, for example being able to attend PEP meetings and reviews. Such meetings are seen by the school as a core part of the designated teacher’s role. They allow the teacher to work with other professionals involved in a child’s care and provide an opportunity for information sharing.

The designated teacher has a proactive role. She keeps form tutors and other teachers informed of any support needs and other relevant issues concerning individual pupils and ensures that children in care access relevant support programmes which the school provides.

In **Sunderland**, social services send details of children in care directly to schools as changes occur so that designated teachers know who is in care in their school. Limited teaching roles mean that designated teachers can establish regular contact with the young people and their carers.

Designated teachers in secondary schools liaise with primary school counterparts over secondary school transition and to share knowledge about the needs of individual children. Designated teachers frequently represent schools at care reviews, and receive an annual programme of training provided by the local authority.

Young people who have struggled in school often respond positively to a college environment but may need additional support, especially if they are also adjusting to independent living for the first time. Connexions advisors have an important role to play in helping young people to make successful transitions, whether into further education or training.

In **Brighton**, the City College offers additional support from Personal Advisors (PAs). The scheme is called New Start. Potential college students are identified through an exchange of information between schools and the college during year 11. The development worker for looked after children ensures that all young people who want to go to college, including those in out of authority placements returning to Brighton and Hove, are included in the scheme. The PA takes responsibility for the young people before they arrive at college. The PAs keep in touch during the summer holidays and ensure that the young people are organised for college, know their timetable and so on.

When the care leavers are at college, the PAs are there to give them practical and emotional support. The young people have meal vouchers, bus passes and the opportunity to talk about their worries. When there are attendance issues, the PAs go to the young people’s homes to find out what is going on. **For further information, contact: Loveday Pope on 01273 667788.**

SUPPORT AT HOME

The issues

- Effective support at home for learning and development is crucial to educational success. This includes access to age appropriate books and equipment.
- Carers and social workers need to have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting education.
- Not all carers receive training on children's educational needs or support to meet those needs.

Family breakdown is one of the major reasons why children have to go into care. The **Jumoke Family Resource Centre in Greenwich**, was set up to prevent family breakdown and help keep children at home. With funding from Quality Protects (QP), the centre looked at what services they could offer that would benefit children in care and improve educational outcomes. As a result the centre runs:

- sports and drama clubs;
- music lessons;
- behaviour management groups for carers and children together;
- a Saturday morning club to help children catch up on missed schooling; and
- it undertakes some outreach work in the community.

The Saturday club is available to all primary school age children in care placed in Greenwich, between year 1 and year 6. The focus is on improving attainment at Key Stage 1 & 2 and they have the flexibility to offer the classes to non-looked after children where appropriate. There is a strong commitment to improving learning, and the children attend regularly along with their carers.

The Centre employs two teachers, one for each Key Stage. A number of social workers who are based at the centre can also provide study support.

Resources to support learning – QP ICT initiative

Children and young people increasingly have access to computers and other information technology to help them with their schoolwork and to develop new skills. In July 2001, the Government announced a new £20m scheme to increase access to information technology for children in and leaving care.

Funding is available over two financial years and the money is being distributed as part of the Quality Protects programme. Each council will be given a minimum allocation of £10K.

More information on Quality Protects can be found on the DH web site at:
<http://www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects/index.htm>

A number of providers employ tutors to work with children in their home settings providing extra tuition to help children catch up with work they have missed or to help them prepare for GCSEs.

The **Southwark Home Tuition Project** is targeted at children in care in Year 10 and 11 who are studying for GNVQs/GCSEs. Tutors provide guidance on course work and help young people to prepare for their exams. In 2002, three quarters of those children participating in the project gained at least five GCSEs A*– G grades, compared to just 30 per cent of those who did not participate.

As part of the fostering assessment process, Southwark foster carers are assessed on their attitudes to education as well as their ability to support the child. Where carers have basic skills needs of their own they are offered training and on-going support. A central part of this training is a literacy pack which carers work through on their own and then with the child.

Training front line workers and reducing stigma: Manchester

Care leavers from Manchester formed the **Yippee Group** (Young Independent People Presenting Education and Entertainment) to deliver training to professionals providing services to children in care. They use their personal experiences of being in care to provide a better understanding of children's needs. The training works to address stereotypes and place the challenging behaviour of some children in context.

Training is open to social workers, carers and teachers, as well as those working in health, leisure, housing, or the police. The group has received very positive feedback, including praise from professionals with many years of experience.

TARGETS

The issues

- The Department of Health's Public Service Agreement (PSA), published in July 2002, included a commitment to review the target on the education of children in care in light of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) project.
- The Government's objective is to substantially narrow the gap between the attainment and participation of children in care and that of their peers.
- The target aims to encourage action to support attainment by **all** children in care. This includes younger children, those who are able and have the potential to achieve at a high level, and those with difficulties who need support to remain engaged with education at all.

The target will apply only to children who have been in care for one year or more.

Promoting the attainment of children who spend a shorter time in care is also important. The Government is committed to analysing new data on outcomes for young people who have spent *any* time in care.

The results of this analysis will be used to inform the development of future policy.

The new target

Improve life chances for children, including by:

- substantially narrowing the gap between the educational attainment and participation of children in care and that of their peers by 2006.

This target will have been achieved if, by 2006:

- outcomes for 11 year olds in English and maths are at least 60 per cent as good as those of their peers;
- the proportion who become disengaged from education is reduced, so that no more than 10 per cent reach school leaving age without having sat a GCSE equivalent exam; and
- the proportion of those aged 16 who get qualifications equivalent to five GCSEs graded A*– C has risen on average by 4 percentage points each year since 2002; and in all authorities at least 15 per cent of young people in care achieve this level of qualifications.

To ensure that all children are challenged to achieve their potential the SEU proposes that **individual education targets** should be set for all children in care, as part of the existing planning process. Local authorities should monitor both the appropriateness and the achievement of these targets. DH and DfES will be consulting stakeholders on how best to implement this proposal.

There are no changes to the elements of the PSA target relating to the level of education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers aged 19, the proportion of children in care who are cautioned or convicted, and the under-18 conception rate.

A better education for children in care

*I've been out of school for a year and a half
and I've realised how important it is.*

Male, age 15, Foster Care

The Social Exclusion Unit's report on raising the educational attainment of children in care is due to be published shortly. Many local authorities are already taking action to tackle low attainment. This document highlights some of the promising practice from around the country. It aims to encourage all those working with and caring for children in care to take action including areas that may not traditionally be seen as their own.

SEU research found that many children in care enjoy school, and almost all think it is important. But a large number have had poor experiences in education: six out of 10 have been bullied, and they are 13 times more likely to be permanently excluded than their peers.

Statistics show that children in care have particularly low levels of attainment. Only eight per cent of 16 year olds who had spent at least one year in care in 2001 achieved five A*– C grades at GCSE, compared to half of all young people¹. In Key Stage tests at age seven, 11 and 14, they also had poor results, and just one per cent go on to university.

¹ Department of Health, *Outcome Indicators for Looked-After Children: Twelve months to 30 September 2001, England* (London, DH, 2002). 'GCSE level' includes GNVQs and other equivalent qualifications. Comparisons with national figures should be made with caution as DH data looks at young people leaving care who may be 16, 17 or 18 years old, whereas DfES data only covers children in year 11 during the 2000/01 school year.

Progress so far

I really like school and it is no different because I am in care.

Female, age 15, Residential Unit

The Government has introduced a number of initiatives to support the educational attainment of children in care including:

- Quality Protects, a five-year programme launched in 1998 to transform the management and delivery of children's social services. It included national objectives for children's services with targets for local authorities in key areas, and was supported by £885m of new money. From April 2004, the Quality Protects Grants will be included in local authorities' baseline budgets.
- Issuing joint DH/DfES **Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care** in 2000 and establishing a team, seconded from local authorities, to advise and respond to any implementation issues that local authorities may have. One of the outcomes from this work is the Education Protects website www.dfes.gov.uk/educationprotects.
- National Minimum Standards for children's homes and fostering services published in 2002; and
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, which places new duties on local authorities to support care leavers. The Act came into force from October 2001.

These initiatives have led to some significant improvements such as better training for frontline workers and dedicated local authority officers and teams to support children in care. In the best areas more than one in eight children in care are getting five or more good GCSEs. Informal feedback suggests that fewer children in care are absent from school than was previously the case. The SEU report will build on recent progress to develop better opportunities for children in care.

The issues

People (especially the teachers) expect you to do badly in exams because of your problems. But I did well in GCSEs and everyone was surprised and were saying 'I didn't expect you to get such good grades because of your problems'. People put you down but you do get praised when you do well.

Female, age 16, Secure Unit

Extensive consultation with key stakeholders and young people highlighted five key reasons why children in care underachieve in education:

- too many young people's lives are characterised by instability;
- young people in care spend too much time out of school or other learning environments;
- children do not have sufficient help with their education if they get behind;
- primary carers are not always expected, or equipped, to provide sufficient support and encouragement for learning and development; and
- many children have unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs.

In addition to these five reasons, children's education is adversely affected by a number of underlying factors that make change difficult. These include staff and skills shortages, structures that act as a barrier to joined-up working and weaknesses in management and leadership. These areas will be addressed in the forthcoming Green Paper on Children at Risk, announced by the Prime Minister in October 2002.

Funding

*My foster carer has helped me a lot,
e.g. she has made me confident in my schoolwork.*

Female, age 11, Foster Care

The Government has recently announced two new funding streams that can be used to support the education of children in care:

- The Vulnerable Children's Grant worth £84m each year over three years, will support LEA initiatives to raise the educational attainment of children in care and other groups of vulnerable children;
- Choice Protects funding, worth £113m over three years, is ring-fenced for improvements to fostering services, including measures to promote placement stability. Funding can be used to help foster carers to support children's education.

For more information on any of these issues, you can visit the 'Education Protects for Children in Care' website, at:
www.dfes.gov.uk/educationprotects



Social Exclusion Unit
7th Floor
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Telephone: 020 7944 5550

Email: seuenquiries@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

Web: www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk