



EDUCATION & SOCIAL CARE

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT TEAM

THEMATIC REVIEW

**ATTAINMENT & ACHIEVEMENTS
OF
LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

MARCH 2013

ATTAINMENT & ACHIEVEMENTS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Aim of the review

To evaluate how partnership working is contributing to the attainment and achievements of looked after children (LAC).

Rationale for the review

The Education and Social Care Senior Management Team agreed a set of thematic reviews which would be undertaken by the Continuous Improvement Team. The plans for the reviews were endorsed by the Children and Young Peoples Services Committee.

This report covers the first of these reviews.

The rationale for this review is in keeping with one of the five key themes from the national Looked After Children Strategic Implementation Group: *'Improving educational outcomes for looked after children'*.

Background

There are various reports, national priorities and areas of legislation which relate to this review. These include: ***Children (Scotland) Act 1995*** *'Children who are looked after should have the same educational opportunities as all other children for education, including further and higher education, and access to other opportunities for development'*; ***Looked After Children, We Can and Must Do Better Scottish Government (2007)-*** *'Scotland's looked after children and young people should be encouraged and supported throughout their lives to maximise their educational potential. All of our looked after children and young people should have the required skills, knowledge and confidence to become effective life-long learners.'*; ***Education & Culture Committee Scottish Parliament (2012)*** *'when social work, health and educational professionals work well together, a difference is made to the lives of looked after children'*; and **Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights** which states that "no person shall be denied the right to education. In a leading case on article 2 of protocol 1 the European Court of Human Rights (EHRR 252) stated that this right includes a right to an effective education.

Scope of the review

The review involved the study of data and documentation and interviews with a wide range of stakeholders including; teachers, social workers, senior officers, residential care workers, foster carers and a number of young people currently in S3-S4 in Moray secondary schools who are looked after.

How are we doing?

The review identified the following positive aspects:

- The introduction of the new Education and Social Care Department was seen as a strength and a positive indicator for future partnership working
- There is a recognition amongst staff that early intervention is key to securing success for young people with the GIRFEC agenda helping to support the way forward
- The recognition of the importance of attainment and achievement as outcomes for looked after children
- The willingness and commitment by all staff to securing better outcomes for looked after children through further improvements in partnership working.

What key outcomes have we achieved?

At an early stage the review identified that there were major weaknesses in the department's collection and analysis of data. Too much of the data in relation to the attainment and achievements of looked after children was inconsistent and there was no overall strategy for data management. Baseline assessment information for looked after children was not available centrally therefore it was not possible to compare the achievements and attainment of looked after children to that of children with similar ability nor could comparison be made with comparator Authorities. The Scottish Government does not collect information about the attainment of looked after children in a format which would generate reliable comparative data against which Moray could benchmark itself. It was established that there was no clarity as to roles and responsibility for data management and analysis across the department therefore there was no specific rigorous target setting and tracking for looked after children.

Raw attainment data for 2012 indicated that overall attainment for looked after children in Moray was higher amongst those children who were looked after away from home compared to those who were looked after at home. This was consistent with the national picture. Given the relatively small number of looked after children in Moray, in overall percentage terms, it was not possible to draw any conclusions about the relative levels of attainment of looked after children compared with children who are not looked after. Schools hold a significant range of data about attainment and can identify those children or young people who are looked after and consider their attainment in relation to that of their peers. However there was no evidence of any specific initiative to address any apparent gap in attainment. Senior officers within Education and Social Care recognised the need to improve access to quality data.

Attendance and absence data for the period to May 2012 did not indicate any major areas of concern. Attendance data is only collected and collated nationally biennially therefore again comparative analysis was not possible. Unauthorised absence of more than 10 days was recorded for 20 looked after children; however the review identified inconsistencies in how this data was recorded across schools, particularly in relation to out-of-area placements. During the year to May 2012 17 looked after children in Moray had been excluded from school. Of these five children accounted for almost two thirds of the days excluded. The exclusion of looked after young people from school and the provision of a small number of hours tuition as an alternative has had an almost universally adverse effect on both residential and foster placements.

Individual education plans (IEPs) were not consistent in terms of their content and format. There was insufficient education information shared between partner agencies who support looked after children. Currently only one social worker has access to electronically held central data. Attainment reports to social work follow the parental reporting format however attainment targets and tracking information were not routinely shared with social work. As a result, attainment trends for looked after children were not known to central officers who were trying to maintain a strategic overview. There is a need for better, more structured, information sharing. The team around the child needs to know about attainment; therefore the Child's plan must contain learning and attainment targets, as well as other school information such as attendance. The attainment of looked after children needs to be a more prominent feature in meetings between school and social work staff. All those supporting looked after children need to know if the young person is attaining and achieving in line with their potential. An information sharing protocol should address any concerns that may arise out of a consideration of the right to respect for privacy and family life as contained in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. These can be addressed by including procedures for obtaining consent from the

pupils concerned and their carers and by balancing this right against the right to effective education.

For most looked after children there was an appropriate emphasis on wider achievements but this was not systematically and consistently recorded. There were a number of instances in which looked after young people had participated and achieved at a significant level in a wide range of community-based learning opportunities. However, mention of specific award schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh or John Muir Awards, involving looked after children, was rare.

One school had developed an effective personal achievement profile for looked after children and this should be shared across the authority.

There were a number of examples of individual looked after young people who had attained at a high level and progressed from school to college or university. While these were a minority they were certainly not isolated instances.

As yet, there is not a sufficiently clear focus on the use and analysis of attainment and other outcome data, alongside meaningful contextual and evaluative data, in informing policy, strategy or routine improvement planning in relation to the attainment and achievements of looked after children.

What impact have we had on the people who use our service?

Many looked after young people did not, at the start of a period of being looked after, have high expectations, either of themselves or of those around them, including schools and teachers. In some cases negative expectations had been turned around, but many looked after children are not motivated to participate and too many of the looked after children had low expectations of themselves. Looked after children are generally positive about staff and the support they receive. They feel they are generally encouraged to do well. There were examples in which the motivation of looked after children to learn had been improved and maintained over significant periods of time, even where this represented an initially significant challenge.

The extent to which looked after children and young people feel included and involved in the life of their school was difficult to gauge. There were positive and negative examples, but the picture seemed fairly mixed, with the background and disposition of the young person not being the only variable. All of the young people interviewed highlighted the importance of friendships at school. However, they were often isolated in their chosen interests. Participation in extra-curricular activities or clubs, whether after school or during breaks, did not appear to be very common. While the availability and accessibility of organised community based learning opportunities across Moray will vary considerably, though the environment itself presents opportunities for beneficial activities, every effort should be made by foster carers and all staff who work with these young people to encourage their engagement and involvement in activities which offer opportunities for further achievement.

For those young people whose engagement with learning had been successful, that success had a broader positive impact on other aspects of their welfare and supported more successful transitions into adulthood and independence. When engagement with learning improved, through positive encouragement, the learner felt empowered to achieve

more. This was not necessarily supported by higher attainment. It would appear that this, to a greater or lesser extent, is the experience of the majority of looked after children.

Carers cited many instances in which transition planning between primary and secondary school and onwards from secondary school had turned out to be inadequate. There was overwhelming agreement amongst carers that the quality of partnership work between school staff and carers varied enormously between schools. Experienced carers felt clear that they could identify, with almost complete reliability, which schools welcome and support looked after young people and the involvement of their carers. All carers have a high level of investment in achieving positive outcomes with and for the children and young people for whom they care, though this was especially evident with foster carers.

While the review identified areas of effective partnership working, there is still much scope for further improvements, in particular in transition arrangements and in the engagement of parents and carers in the child and young person's education.

How good is our delivery of key processes?

There was a perception among professionals that partnership working was improving, with partners gaining a better understanding of their respective roles. Relationships between partner agencies were generally good, and there was a recognition that under the new integrated department of Education and Social Care, there was greater co-operation and a genuine willingness of staff from different sections to work together for the benefit of young people. There were some examples of good practice where the team around the child had worked well together resulting in positive outcomes for the child. However, at times, services had been slow to provide support due to barriers in systems and processes. There needed to be a more proactive approach at an earlier stage.

All schools had looked after children co-ordinators and teaching staff in the primary school sector tended to be aware of who the looked after children were. Guidance staff in secondary schools were aware of who the looked after children were, but other teaching staff were generally unaware. There was a view prevalent in secondary schools that looked after children should be treated in the same way as other children. While the young people interviewed clearly did not wish to be identified as being looked after, they were acutely aware of their strengths and weaknesses as learners. They were often struggling with aspects of literacy and numeracy and did not always feel confident in seeking help and advice. Young people interviewed did say, however, that they would welcome support if handled sensitively. Some pupils said they were keen to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and would take advantage of small group tutorial type support if this were to be made available. Most of the pupils interviewed stated that they were expected to work hard and that they received praise when something was done well. There was a clear need for all schools to take account of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 *'which automatically deems that all looked after children and young people have additional support needs unless the education authority determine that they do not require additional support in order to benefit from school education. In addition, education authorities must consider whether each looked after child or young person for whose school education they are responsible requires a co-ordinated support plan'*. In addition, schools may need to be reminded of the public sector equality duty to pay due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity even if this means treating some people more favourably than others.

There was a need to clarify the roles of guidance staff and looked after children co-ordinators and to provide appropriate training for those involved, including strategies for supporting young people requiring a degree of flexibility in approach.

All of the pupils interviewed were clear about who they could approach in school or at home if they were worried about something. This included guidance teachers, or a class teacher with whom a good relationship had been developed, social workers and foster carers. While all of the pupils were working on SQA courses, application and motivation to work hard was variable.

All pupils interviewed could identify an occupation, career, or further education course to which they aspired on leaving school. However, only a few had fully undertaken the research into appropriate pathways.

The young people were asked about whether or not their views were taken into account when meetings, involving a range of professionals, were held for them. All of the pupils said that they had good opportunities to express their views, but these were often not subsequently taken into account. Most of the young people interviewed felt that too many negative things were fed back to different agencies.

Staff reported that it was sometimes difficult to get parents to engage. Non-school staff and carers were keen to support young people's learning but were often unclear about how to do this. While carers demonstrated a strong sense of personal investment in the young people, there was a lack of knowledge and understanding of Curriculum for Excellence. In terms of homework, for example, training for foster carers was required to ensure they were able to support young people as appropriate. All of the pupils had homework issued to them from time to time, but none of the pupils appeared to have regular homework. Pupils' application to homework was variable. Social workers and foster carers did ask about how the pupils were getting on, or whether or not they had homework. Some flexibility is required in dealing with homework issues, to take account of the age, stage and motivation of the young person.

Where individual education plans (IEPs) were in place there needed to be a greater emphasis on attainment and more detail about what carers could provide to support attainment. Carers were only rarely aware of there being a written plan specifically to support engagement, attainment and achievements in learning, either in the form of the Child's plan, as is required for all looked after children and subject to statutory reviewing processes, or as a separate IEP, Personal Learning Plan or Coordinated Support Plan. Carers thought that there should be a clear and explicit plan for all looked after children because of the nature and variability of their support needs and the sources of their difficulties. The extent of the potential contribution of foster carers was not being fully realised, and should be greater than solely dealing with school attendance and care issues. Care should be taken to ensure appropriate plans are in place with sufficient focus on what is required, within school and beyond, to support looked after children and young people's engagement, attainment and achievements.

It is important that steps are taken to harmonise and streamline assessment and planning processes for children rather than having LIAP meetings, Looked After Children Review meetings and Core Group meetings running in parallel. Training is required on strategies to involve non-school staff and carers in supporting children's learning.

How well do we lead and improve the quality of our work?

Almost all stakeholders interviewed indicated that, to date, there had been a lack of a clearly communicated vision and direction from the authority on expectations for the attainment and achievements of looked after children. Relevant policy documents needed to be updated and revised to include clear guidelines and expectations. All staff who work with looked after children need to comply with the recommendations in Policy and Practice Papers. The attainment and achievements of looked after children needed to feature more prominently in authority, team and establishment improvement plans. There has been a lack of suitable training for staff on issues related to looked after children; however it was acknowledged that Educational Psychological Services had provided some valuable training. School staff indicated that they needed more training in how they work with looked after children and probationer teachers were identified as a group in particular need of guidance. Overall there is a need for more awareness raising and training to ensure education and social work have a shared understanding of the strategies for supporting educational outcomes for looked after children.

There had been no specific self-evaluation of the contribution of various services to achieving outcomes for looked after children and this had led to a view that there was an overall lack of accountability. In spite of best efforts from some senior staff it was unclear to most stakeholders as to who was ensuring the needs of looked after children were being met.

An encouraging initiative over the last two years has seen the Corporate Management Team (CMT) receive helpful reports on looked after children from senior officers and invited head teachers. These reports enable the CMT to retain a strategic overview of matters affecting looked after children and of the impact of actions. These reports should now be expanded to give a greater analysis of attainment and achievement issues.

Elected members have received various reports over the last few years regarding looked after young people in relation to their inclusion, attainment and achievements. While an annual report was submitted to the Children and Young People's Services Committee on looked after children this did not contain sufficient detail on attainment although one annual statutory Performance Indicator in relation to the attainment of looked after children is reported to Elected Members.

In spite of previous shortcomings in this area in the past there was a widespread view that the new integrated department provides opportunity to rectify this. There was also a clear expectation that the envisaged re-structured Community Planning Partnership would provide an opportunity for higher level strategic planning in relation to looked after children.

What do we need to do now?

As a result of the review the following areas for improvement have been identified:

- Education and Social Care needs to provide clearer strategic leadership by communicating its vision, policy and guidelines on improving the attainment and achievements of looked after children, including roles and responsibilities.
- The department needs to improve the management of attainment and achievement data in relation to looked after children to ensure there are robust arrangements in place to benchmark performance, set appropriate targets and track progress.

- The department needs to provide training for authority staff and partner agencies in supporting looked after children's learning and monitoring and tracking their progress
- All staff who support looked after children need to improve communication ensuring that all relevant information, including attainment data, is shared on a 'need to know basis' and lead professional's files need to contain appropriate information on attainment and achievements.
- In line with legislation, Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009, schools need to ensure that appropriate arrangements are put in place to support looked after children in their learning.

Conclusion

The review has established that there is a clear commitment to partnership working and supporting the needs of looked after children within Moray Council. The above areas for improvement now need to be included within Education and Social Care Improvement Plans.