
**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF 'LOOKED AFTER' CHILDREN –
TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP – FINAL REPORT**

Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor Stephen Harker, Education Portfolio

Responsible Director(s) - Geoff Pennington, Director of Education

Purpose of Report

1. To report the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee's recommendations on the outcome of the Educational Attainment of 'Looked After Children' Task and Finish Group.

Information and Analysis

2. The Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting held on 9th February, 2004, established a Task and Finish Review Group to consider the educational attainment of 'looked after' children.
3. The Task and Finish Review Group presented its final report (**attached as an Appendix**) to the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 5th April, 2004.
4. At this meeting, the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee supported the recommendations of the Task and Finish Review Groups, as detailed below, and referred them to Cabinet for consideration :-
 - (a) That the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee have a presentation on the Strategy and the effect of the Strategy be monitored by the Committee.
 - (b) That the good practice in supporting 'looked after' children in schools be shared across the Borough.
 - (c) That ways of assessing 'attainment' other than just by examination targets be further developed.
 - (d) That the Council actively promotes the employment of care leavers through its equal opportunities policies.
 - (e) That initiatives such as the provision of mentors for 14-16 years and business links to give pupils an 'idea of possibility' be extended.

Directors Comments

5. It is important that members develop their role as the corporate parent of looked after children and actively seek information about the performance of this group of pupils. The recommendations of Scrutiny Committee are, therefore, to be welcomed. In one particular area, the provision of members, the Authority is working with its partners to develop this provision further by use of Excellence in Cluster funding.

Outcome of Consultation

6. No formal consultation was undertaken in the production of this report other than the consultation undertaken by the Review Group itself.

Legal Implications

7. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

8. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

9. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework

Decision Deadline

10. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

Recommendation

11. It is recommended that the recommendations of Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee be adopted.

Reasons

12. The recommendations is supported as it will enable the Authority to help discharge its responsibilities for 'looked after' children.

Geoff Pennington
Director of Education

Background Papers

Reports to the meetings of the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee held on 9th February and 5th April, 2004.

Lynne Wood : Extension 2287
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EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF 'LOOKED AFTER' CHILDREN TASK AND FINISH REVIEW GROUP

FINAL REPORT

Introduction

1. This is the Final Report of the Task and Finish Review Group established by the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 9th June, 2003 to consider the Educational Attainment of 'Looked After Children' (LACs).
2. The report describes how the Task and finish Review was conducted and its findings and recommendations. It is important to stress at this point that Task and Finish Reviews are not intended to be full-scale reviews, but ones which may highlight areas which require attention or further investigation. The Group would, therefore, like to stress that the contents of this report is not the outcome of a detailed Review into the educational attainment of LACs in the Borough, but provides a brief overview of statistical information on the educational attainment of LACs, the views of the stakeholders and gives details of initiatives of the Council to address the educational under-achievement of LACs.

Membership of the Task and Finish Review Group

3. The following members on the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee comprised the membership of the Task and Finish Group.

Councillor V. Copeland

Councillor E. A. Richmond

Mr. B. Egan, Secondary School Teacher Representative Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee.

Acknowledgements

4. The Task and Finish Review Group acknowledges the support and assistance provided in the course of its investigations and would like to place on record their thanks to the following:

Gail Bowen, Assistant Director (Inclusion) Education Department,

Alison Walton, Head of Children's Services, Social Services Department,

Rita Taylor, Acting Service Manager, Children and Families,

The two Designated Teachers and the Foster Carer who took the time to talk to the Group,

Elaine Clark, Child Protection Co-ordinator,

Jan Lefevre Commissioning Manager (children);

The Resident and Members of Staff of the Residential Care Home that the Group visited and Christine Bates, Democratic Support Officer.

Aim of Review

5. The initial aim of the Review was to gain an overview of the current educational attainment of 'looked after' children in the Borough and highlight, if any, areas causing concern and

make recommendations to Cabinet thereon.

To achieve the above the Group decided to gain an overview of:

(a) statistical information relating to the academic and non-academic achievement of children in the 'looked after' system;

(b) consider the Government's position on the educational attainment of LACs;

(c) consider policies/strategies within the Borough for encouraging children in the 'looked after' system to achieve their maximum potential; and

(d) talk to various stakeholders, including representatives from the Education and Social Services Departments, Schools and young people.

Methods of Investigation

6. The Group met five times between 24th July, 2003 and 27th October, 2003 and had discussions during those meetings with Officers in the Education and Social Services Departments, a primary school and secondary school teacher who were designated teachers whose role was to 'champion' LACS in their schools; and a foster carer.
7. The Group also visited a small residential care home in the Borough to talk to a resident and also members of staff.

Findings

8. Nos of Children Involved:

(a) Nationally there are 60,000 children in care, about 40% are under 10 years old; 20% are under 5 years old.

(b) In Darlington 140 children are in care - 100 out of 140 children are in foster care, 15 are in residential care and 25 are at home with parents or living independently, this figure does, however, fluctuate as children come in and go out of care. A significant issue in Darlington is the number of children in placements external to Darlington, and the impact on education.

9. Information relating to the academic and non-academic achievements of children in care.

(a) There are significant variations nationally in educational attainment within the care population Those who are likely to do better include: children who have been in care for a long time; those who have stable care placements; and/or those whose main placement is in foster care. Girls also outperform boys by a greater margin than is seen in the rest of the population, and children do better when they are placed within their own local authority.

- (b) Education and learning is not confined to the classroom, but also includes activities such as going to museums or historical building. Activities such as sports, drama, arts or music help improve self-esteem, social skills and motivation as well as contributing to learning. Adult support is important to enable children to access these activities successfully.
- (c) Young people who go on to further and higher education are more likely to drop out without completing the course, with accommodation and financial difficulties, or a lack of support from a nominated person being the main reasons. Problems include local authorities not having a specific budget to support care leavers in higher education, or a lack of accommodation in university vacations. Funding to implement the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 can be used to support young people's education.

9. National Performance Indicators

- (a) The national performance indicators referring to qualifications of children who have left care are as follows:

The percentage of young people leaving care age 16 or over with at least 5 GCSE grade A-C, 2001/02 not collected, 2002-03 8.3%

The Percentage of young people leaving care age 16 or over with a least 1 GCSE grade A-G or a GNVQ 2001-02 25% and 2002/03 42%.

9. Darlington's Performance

- (a) The results of the Authority's performance against BV50 which measures the percentage of LACs who have at least 1 GCSE grades A-G or GNVQ on leaving care are as follow. It should be noted that the numbers are relatively low and hence subject to particular fluctuation depending upon the cohort and circumstances.

Year	Target	Actual
2001/02	50%	25%
2002/03	75%	50%

It would appear from the above that Darlington is performing in line with the Government's target detailed above.

- (a) The results in Darlington of 'looked after' children compared to their peer group are as follows

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GCSE results 5A – C LAC	2002 – 0%	2003	12%
GCSE results 5A-C Peer Group	2002 – 49%	2003	50%

GCSE results 1A –G LAC		2002 – 50%	2003	54%
GCSE results 1A-G Peer Group		2002 – 96%	2003	95%
Key Stage 2 results (11 year olds) reaching Level 4				
English	LAC	2002 – 60%	2003	80%
	Peer Group	2002 – 73%	2003	74%
Maths	LAC	2002 – 40%	2003	60%
	Peer Group	2002-76%	2003	73%

**information not collected*

The above information indicates that, with the exception of English at Key Stage 2, LACS do less well than their peers. The percentage differences are not so great at Key Stage 2, but difference increase considerably at GCSE stage.

9. New Government Target

The Government target relating to the educational attainment of LACs is to substantially narrow the gap between the educational attainment and participation of children in care and that of their peers by 2006 by:

- Outcomes for 11 year olds in English and Maths being at least 60% as good as those of their peers;
- No more than 10% Reaching school leaving age without having sat a GCSE or equivalent exam.
- Proportion of those achieving a qualification equivalent to 5 GCSE A-C has risen on average by 4% each year since 2002 and at least 15% of all young people in care to achieve this level of qualification.

9. What explains these poor outcomes?

- (a) At least some of this poor achievement is explained by other disadvantages. Children in care are more likely to be from groups that tend to do less well in education. They are also much more likely to have statements of special educational need – 27 per cent have statements compared to 3 per cent of all children. However, even taking account of these factors, children in care as a group do significantly worse than their peers.
- (b) Longitudinal data on outcomes for children in care is very limited. However, analysis undertaken for the project of outcomes for children in care in the 1970s and 1980s suggest that where children spent time in children’s homes, around half of their low attainment could be attributed to the care status. Although the care system and the profile of the care population have changed since that time, they do indicate that the low attainment of children in care cannot wholly be explained away by other factors.

9. Initiatives to Improve Outcomes for LACs in Darlington

There is evidence that efforts are being made by the Council to improve outcomes of LACs and one major development by the Authority to address the under-achievement of LACs is the development of a Joint Education and Social Services Strategy for Improvement in the Educational Attainment of Looked After Children (Appendix 2). The Strategy for the education of looked after children is no different to the strategy for all children – this is, supporting the raising of standards for all, which is an integral part of Darlington’s Community Strategy. The vision of the Strategy is “that educationally, emotionally and socially all Looked After Children in Darlington will attain to the level of their ability and that they will enjoy a broad and balanced education in schools that understand their needs whilst expecting commitment and success for each child.’

10. Council’s Role as Corporate Parent

The Group would like to remind Members of their role as Corporate Parents. Quality Protects was launched in 1998 as the main vehicle for delivery Government’s ambitions for children’s services, that is effective protection, better quality care and improved life chances. A key element of Quality Protects is the role for local Councils in delivery Government’s ambitions and ensuring, as corporate parents, LACs services are holistic and of the highest quality. Each year local councils look after some 93,000 children who need to leave their homes because of family pressures and problems, abuse or neglect. LACs are not the sole responsibility of social services. The Council as whole is the corporate parent, and councillors have a key role in that. In connection with this role the Department of Education and Skills have produced ‘A Councillors Guide to being a good Corporate Parent’. Appendix 1.

11. Article from ‘Care and Health’

An article which appeared in ‘Care and Health’ Issue 47 October 22 – November 4 2003 Appendix 3. draws attention to the fact that “care leavers, who are among the most vulnerable group of young adults, still find it incredibly difficult to get on the first rung of the career ladder”. The Group highlighted this as an issue which should be considered in connection with the success of educational provision for ‘looked after’ children, as the key to the success or otherwise of education provision should be the ability lead a successful adult life and find meaningful employment.

12. Stakeholders Views.

The Group talked to Officers in both Education and Social Services in the course of the Task and Finish, two designated teachers whose role was to ‘champion’ of LACs in schools and a Foster Carer and the following is a summary of the some of the points raised

- (a) There are support systems in schools for LACs - all had designated teachers to ‘champion’ LACs and provide a link between schools and Council Departments. It appeared, however, that some schools were better than others at supporting LACs and this highlighted a need to share good practice.

- (b) There is evidence that steps have been taken to ensure consistency in 'parental' support for LACs. Regular training is provided for staff and a package of information is available to assist them in their role.
- (c) The length of time that the Council as a 'Corporate Parent' has responsibility of LACs can extend up to 21 years if young people go to university. The point at which a child's educational attainment is measured was the time when the child leaves care. The usual time to leave care is 18. Care leavers are allocated a personal adviser.
- (d) Funding was highlighted as a problem, although it was likely that this would improve next year.
- (e) The need to encourage everyone to have a positive perception about LACs, including Education and Social services having a 'corporate' positive approach and also to celebrate and reward success. There was evidence that this does happen as one example was the Cabinet Member with Social Services Portfolio writing to children congratulating them on their success in NVQ and non-academic qualifications.
- (f) The Group was keen to explore the support given to LACs by carers and that it matched, as far as possible, the support given to children in a traditional home environment There appears to be excellent support for homework and in providing material/rewards/money for trips etc. for LACs. All Council's homes have a Personal Computer and they are available for Foster Carers Homes. Systems are in place to monitor the use of the Internet to ensure children's safety. Carers also attended parents evenings etc.
- (g) The designated teachers highlighted the success which has been achieved by the provision of a learning mentor who works with a target group of children in school, which includes LACs and stated that more learning mentors should be provided for 14-16 year olds. Also a scheme which involved business Ambassadors from a local university working with year 9 pupils to give them an idea of possibility was highlighted as a good initiative.
- (h) Good relationships with Social Worker/Carers were highlighted as imperative to designated teachers in carrying out their role – good relationships did exist, although the turnover of Social Workers seemed to be a problem in some cases.
- (i) The designated teachers consulted were generally satisfied with the systems, but stated that sometimes there was a need for more speedy interaction between teachers and Social Workers. In relation to this the voice mail telephone system at Social Services was highlighted as barrier to quick efficient communication..
- (j) At one school all LACs had gained a qualification, but the designated teacher considered that at least two could have done a lot better with more support.
- (k) Both designated teachers stated that children in the looked after system were generally in a caring environment, whereas this is unlikely to be the case with Children on the Child Protection Register, these children caused the most concern to teachers.

- (l) The Foster Carer consulted was very happy with the support given to her in this role by Social Services Department and schools. She was very enthusiastic about her role and demonstrated that excellent support was given to the children in her care.

18. Visit to Residential Care Home

The Group visited a small residential Care Home in the Borough and talked to a young resident and staff. The home facilities were what you would find in any traditional home environment, it was pleasantly furnished and decorated. The young resident was very willing to talk to the Group and stated that she had previously been a resident of a large residential care home and the small home was much better. It appeared to the Group that the home provided a friendly caring environment and the resident enjoyed facilities similar to other children – having friends and a mentor at school, help with homework etc., owned a mobile telephone, received pocket money and money was available for school trips etc. She also had a clear idea of what career path she wanted to follow. It was expected that she did jobs around the house, but she thought this was right as it was ‘her home’. A computer was available. She felt that some people looked down on her at school because she was in care, and stated that some teachers were very supportive others were not. Staff at the home tried hard to encourage the importance of education – incentives are offered such as visits to show/concerts/CD etc. to go to school and work hard. If child did not attend school incentives are withdrawn. Staff had good working relationships with the resident’s school, but felt there was negativity by some professionals towards children in the looked after system. Support is given to residents if they wish to enrol at College etc. – there was also support available through the Leaving Care Team and Connexions. Staff go to parents evenings, but if possible, they also try to get pupils own parents to attend. Parents get a monthly summary of progress and there is a looked after review every 5 to 6 months. Parents can also come to the home, however parent contact is not always possible. A traditional home environment is maintained. Good communication between all concerned was highlighted as the key to successful support of LACs during their education and recently improvements had been made in this area.

Conclusions

19. In the course of its investigations the Group were unable to highlight any areas of major concern in the support given to LACs. There appeared to be current systems in place for their support and development and although there were areas highlighted as requiring improvement it is envisaged that the Joint Education and Social Services Strategy for Improvement in Educational Attainment of Looked After Children should address these. It is suggested, therefore, that the Scrutiny Committee monitor the Strategy’s impact on the education attainment of LACs. The residential care facility visited was welcoming and homely and the resident seemed to be happy and well catered for. There also appeared to be excellent support for Foster Carers.

Recommendations:

- (a) That the Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Committee have a presentation on the Strategy and that the effect of the Strategy be monitored by the Committee.
- (b) That the good practice in supporting LAC's in schools be shared across the Borough.
- (c) That ways of assessing 'attainment' other than just by examination targets be further developed.
- (d) That the Council actively promotes the employment of care leavers through its equal opportunities policies.
- (e) That initiatives such as the provision of mentors 14-16 years and business links to give pupils an 'idea of possibility' be extended.

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