



IMPROVING THE EDUCATION OF
OUR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

COUNT US



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HMIe
improving Scottish education

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OUR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN



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FOREWORD

Count Us In: Improving the education of our looked after children is the latest publication in the series *Count Us In*, which deals with different aspects of inclusive education. The report aims to help local authorities and partner agencies to improve outcomes for looked after children.

In 2001, *Learning with Care: The Education of Children Looked After Away from Home*, a joint report by HMIE and the then Social Work Services Inspectorate, made important recommendations for the improvement of services for looked after children. This report was complemented by the guidance document *Learning with care: information for carers, social workers and teachers concerning the education of looked after children*, published in 2003. The Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) report *Extraordinary lives: Creating a positive future for looked after children and young people* (2006) and the Ministerial Working Group report *Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better* (2007) also address the issues of education and care of looked after children. The Scottish Government has funded various pilot programmes to improve outcomes for looked after children.

Local authorities have been working with partner agencies to improve outcomes for looked after children. The importance of raising the achievement of looked after children is clear. *Count Us In: Improving the education of our*

looked after children is based on inspection activity and visits to a sample of local authorities to assess the progress being made in improving services and outcomes for looked after children. The report contains evaluations of practice and, most importantly, provides examples of good practice and 'signposts for improvement' which local authorities and their partners can use as they continue to strive to improve educational outcomes for our looked after children and young people.

Scotland's looked after children and young people need to be encouraged and supported to maximise their educational potential and become life long learners. We need to raise awareness of their needs amongst parents, carers, teachers, social workers and health professionals. The introduction of *Curriculum for Excellence* provides an opportunity to introduce flexible learning opportunities and improve the academic, personal and social support required for looked after children and young people. We need to set high expectations for looked after children and establish strong partnership working to meet their needs. In doing so we need to include them and listen to their voice.

We all have a shared responsibility in identifying and meeting the needs of looked after children and young people and removing the barriers to their success in education.

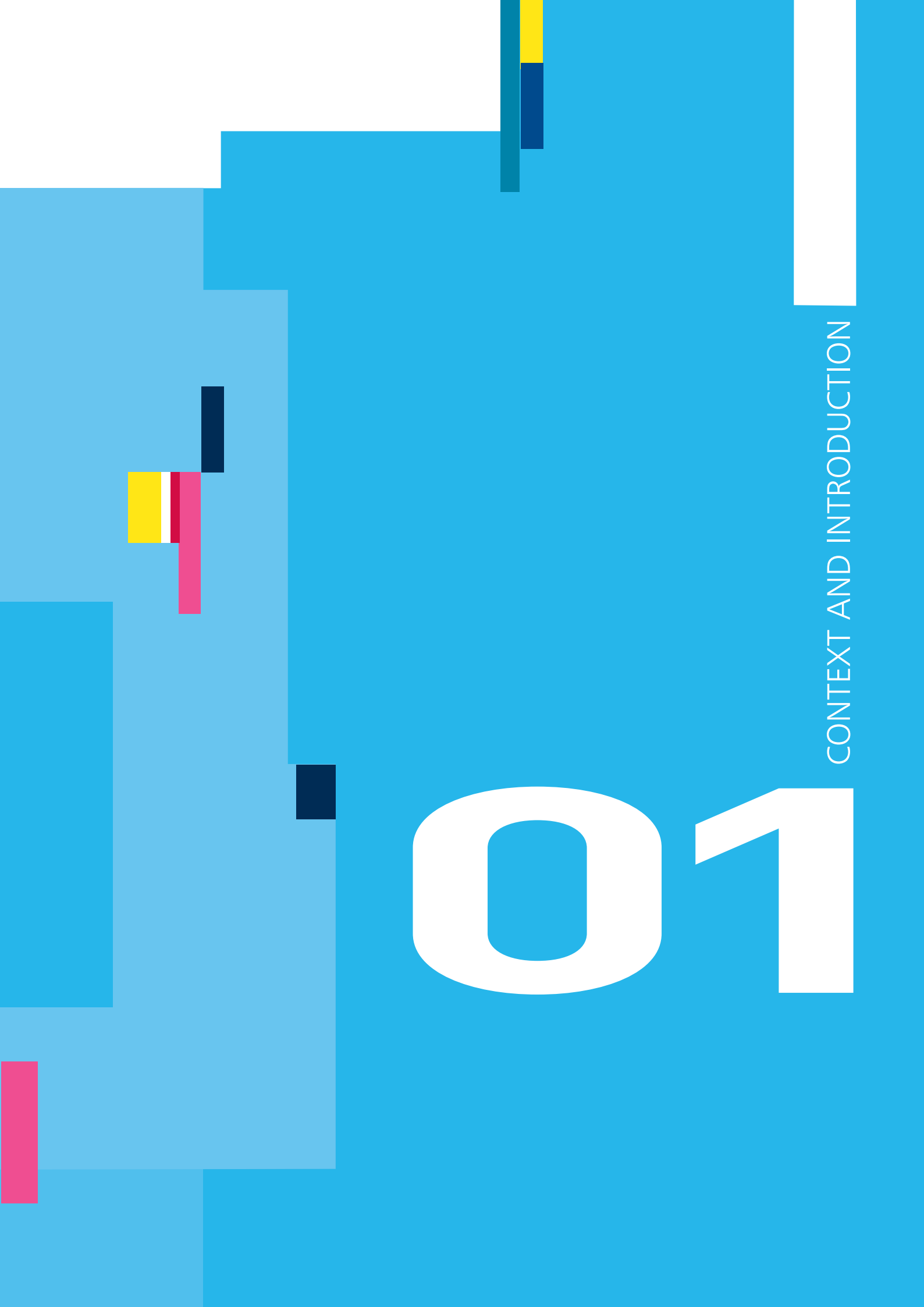
GRAHAM DONALDSON
HM Senior Chief Inspector

June 2008



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CONTEXT AND INTRODUCTION

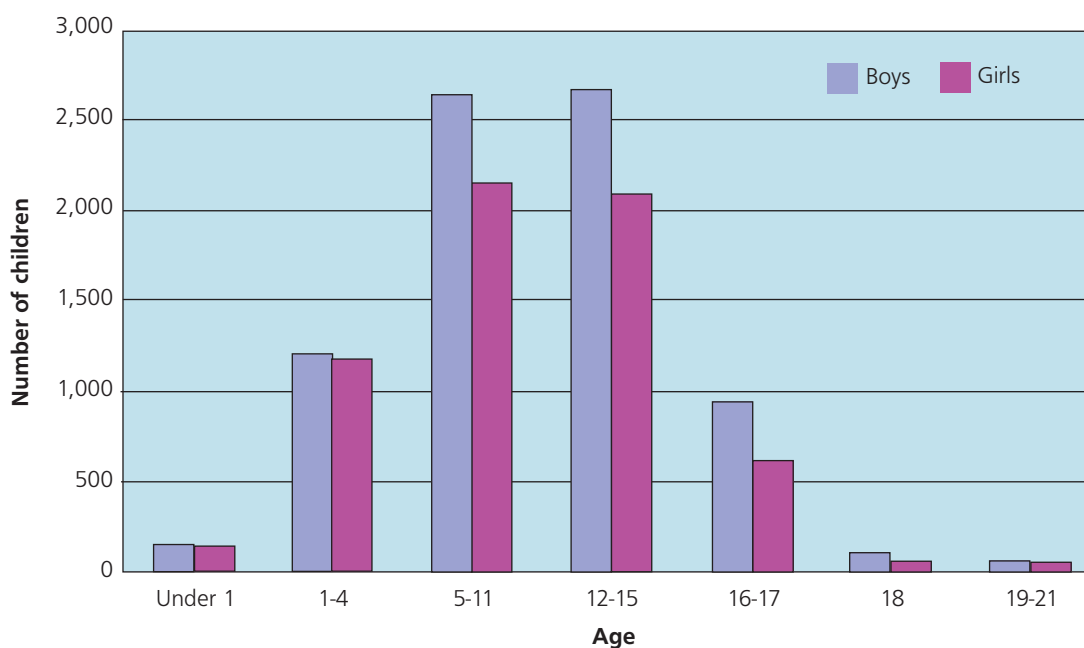


Looked after children

At 31 March 2007, there were 14,060 children looked after by local authorities in Scotland, representing 1.3% of the 0-18 population. Fifty-five percent were male and 45% were female. Sixty-eight percent were aged between five and 15 years old, 19% were under five and

13% were 16 or over. The number of looked after children had increased by 8% since 2006, and by 26% since 1999. Increasing numbers of children and young people become looked after by the local authority due to parental substance and alcohol misuse.

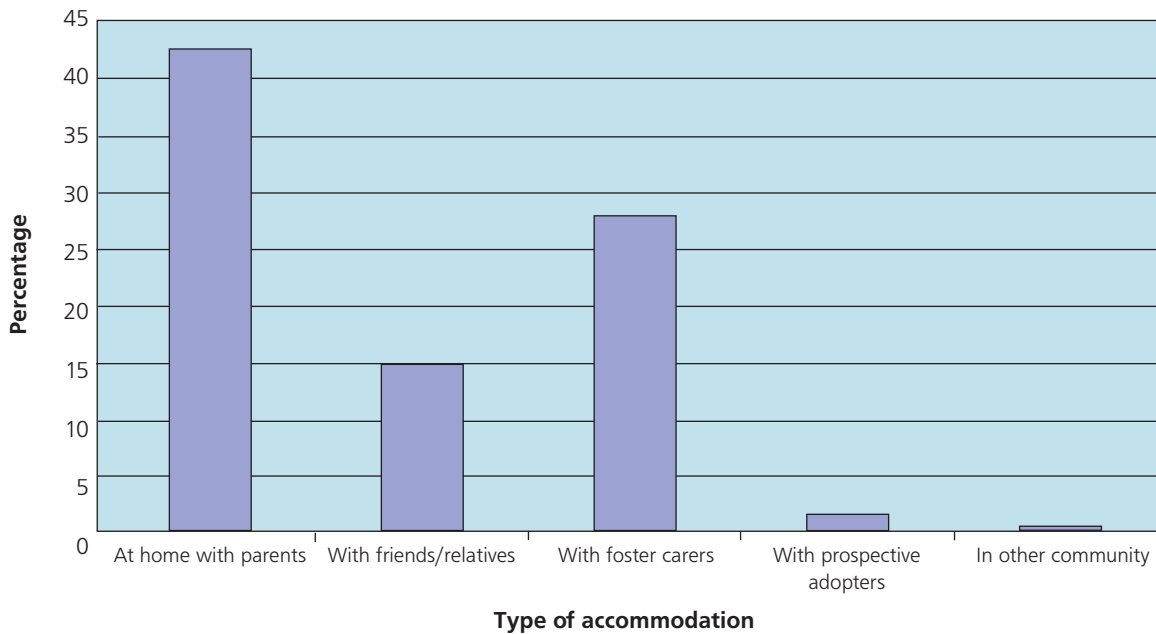
Children looked after at 31st March 2007 by age and gender



The primary focus of this report on 'looked after' children is on those who are looked after at home, subject to a supervision order from a Children's Hearing, but living at home with their birth parent(s) or with other family members, as well as those looked after away from home with foster carers, in residential

care homes, residential schools or secure units. Of the total number of looked after children, 43% were living at home, 15% were with friends or relatives, 29% were with foster carers, and 12% were in residential accommodation. These proportions have not changed significantly over the years.

Percentage of children looked after in the community at 31 March 2007 by type of accommodation



A growing number of children are looked after by kinship carers who are relatives or friends and who have taken responsibility for raising a child, and are doing so with the child on a supervision requirement from the children's hearing system. Children whose supervision requirement names a foster carer or residential establishment become looked after away from home. Children looked after are cared for in a wide variety of settings including foster care, residential care, residential schools and secure care. These services are provided by local authorities, the voluntary sector and the independent sector.

Some children, although looked after by their own local authority, are looked after in settings which are some way from their families and communities. Some children need specialist care, which requires them to be looked after away from their homes; other children are not able to access the resource locally that they need. A number of children are looked after at a time of crisis. In such circumstances, it can be difficult enough to find a placement, far less a placement that has suitable resources to meet the children's needs near their families.

Children become looked after for a variety of reasons. Some are looked after due to concerns about their wellbeing and risk to them from poor

parenting, abuse, neglect and parental substance misuse. A minority of children are looked after because they have committed offences. Children who have supervision requirements following offending behaviour are often the same children that staff in services may have had concerns about previously on care and welfare grounds. There is not always, therefore, clear demarcation between children looked after for care and welfare reasons and those looked after on offence grounds.

Children who become looked after away from home have often first been looked after at home. Sometimes they are placed on a child protection register. There may have been an accumulation of concerns and risks for a child, or there may have been an event which led to a child being looked after. Staff should have assessed the child's needs, the levels of risk to them living in the home situation and taken a decision based on the best interests of the child. Taking the decision to look after a child away from home is complex and challenging, as staff are aware that outcomes for those children are often poor, and if children are older their attachment to parents may be strong. However, outcomes for looked after children at home are generally poorer than those for children looked after elsewhere.

Wherever children are looked after, they have the same right to education as any other child growing up in Scotland. However, looked after children are more likely to be excluded, be placed in non mainstream settings, and have part-time timetables. For many, even attending school is a significant challenge, because education may have been given low priority in their lives and because of the emotional difficulties they experience. For some, being moved frequently causes significant disruption to important relationships and makes settling into a new school very difficult. Having experienced exclusion and failure, it is much more difficult for many looked after children to achieve. At the same time, there are some who do succeed in education and achieve very good educational outcomes. The children and young people themselves invariably tell us that they believe education and educational achievements are important to them. They understand that how well they do at school will have an impact on their achievements when they move into adulthood.

Looked after children away from home clearly have the same human rights as other children. In most circumstances, parental responsibilities for children looked after remain with their birth parents, unless a local authority seeks a Parental Responsibilities Order (PRO) or the child is freed for adoption. Corporate parenting, for most looked after children, does not mean that the local authority has parental rights and responsibilities for the child. It means that the local authority should behave as a good parent would in promoting the child's wellbeing and best interests. There has been growing interest in the promotion of corporate parenting as a means of improving outcomes for looked after children, and recent national reports have focused on the need for local authorities to improve this aspect of their role.

The term 'corporate parent' means the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers. Hereafter, throughout this report, the term 'looked after' is used for all categories of children or young people who are looked after, or looked after at home or away from home, unless there is a need to specify.

Earlier reports on looked after children

There have been a number of significant reports in Scotland which comment on looked after children and their achievements in education:

- > *Learning with Care*¹, the report of an inspection by the Social Work Services Inspectorate and HMIE on children looked after away from home, set out a number of recommendations with a clear agenda for change and improvement. This report is complemented by guidance for providers of services for looked after children².
- > *Extraordinary Lives*³, the national review of looked after children in Scotland emphasised the importance of having high expectations and effective support in education for looked after children.
- > The Scottish Executive report *Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better, 2007*⁴, highlights areas for improvement and identifies actions to take forward. There is recognition that improved educational outcomes for looked after children and young people cannot be achieved unless there is effective inter-agency working to assess and meet their holistic needs in line with the indicators of wellbeing that underpin *Getting it right for every child – Proposals for Action (GIRFEC)*⁵.

¹ *Learning with Care: The Education of Children Looked After Away from Home by Local Authorities*, HMIE and Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2001.

² *Learning with Care: Information for carers, social workers and teachers concerning the education of looked after children and young people*, HMIE and Social Work Services Inspectorate, 2003, ISBN 1 85098 612 6.

³ *Extraordinary Lives: Creating a positive future for looked after children and young people*, Social Work Inspection Agency, 2006, ISBN 1 905501 16 1.

⁴ *Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better*, Scottish Executive, 2007, ISBN 978 0 7559 53059.

⁵ *Getting it right for every child – Proposals for Action*, Scottish Executive, 2005, B39721 6/05.

- > *The Journey to Excellence*, HMIE 2006⁶, recognises that the mental, physical and emotional wellbeing of young people is an essential pre-condition for successful learning.
- > One of the supporting reports for *Extraordinary Lives, Celebrating Success*⁷, researched in detail what had helped a group of looked after children become successful. Key success factors were high expectations, stability in placements, receiving encouragement and support and being with people who take an interest.
- > *Residential Care and Education: Improving practice in residential special schools and secure care accommodation services in Scotland*⁸, provides a staff development guide to support the evaluation of quality across care and education.

Recent initiatives

The *Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act, 2004* introduced a new framework for supporting children and young people with additional support needs in their school education. *Curriculum for Excellence* provides increased choice and flexibility in the curriculum to meet the individual needs of young people. Through these and other initiatives, including pilot projects aimed at improving the educational outcome of looked after children, the LAC Education Forum, *The Fostering and Kinship Care Strategy*, *More Choices More Chances*, and *We Can and Must Do Better*, more emphasis is now being given to offering young people access to a broad range of informal learning opportunities and to recognising their wider achievements. By offering more choices and chances, increased numbers of looked after young people should move into further and higher education, training and employment. An important part of this journey is to ensure that effective planning for post-school transition is in place, with young people being given the

necessary practical assistance by their corporate parents. The *GIRFEC* national programme provides a context for helping all children grow, develop and reach their full potential. The joint Scottish Government and COSLA policy statement, *Early Years and Early Intervention*, provides a framework for addressing the root causes of current social problems through a focus on early years and early intervention and is complementary to *GIRFEC*. The new relationship encapsulated in the concordat between the Scottish Government and COSLA enshrines the purpose of government and provides a focus for local authorities and their Community Planning Partners to improve the achievement of looked after children.

This report

This report, *Count Us In: Improving the education of our looked after children*, explores what has been happening recently regarding the education of looked after children in Scotland. It is recognised that, overall, looked after children achieve less well than their peers. The Scottish Government statistics for *Children Looked After 2006-2007* tell us that:

'Of the young people who left care during 2006-07 beyond minimum school leaving age, 52 per cent had at least one qualification at SCQF level 3 or above, an increase of one percentage point since 2005-06, and 34 per cent had both English and Maths at this level, no increase since 2005-06.'

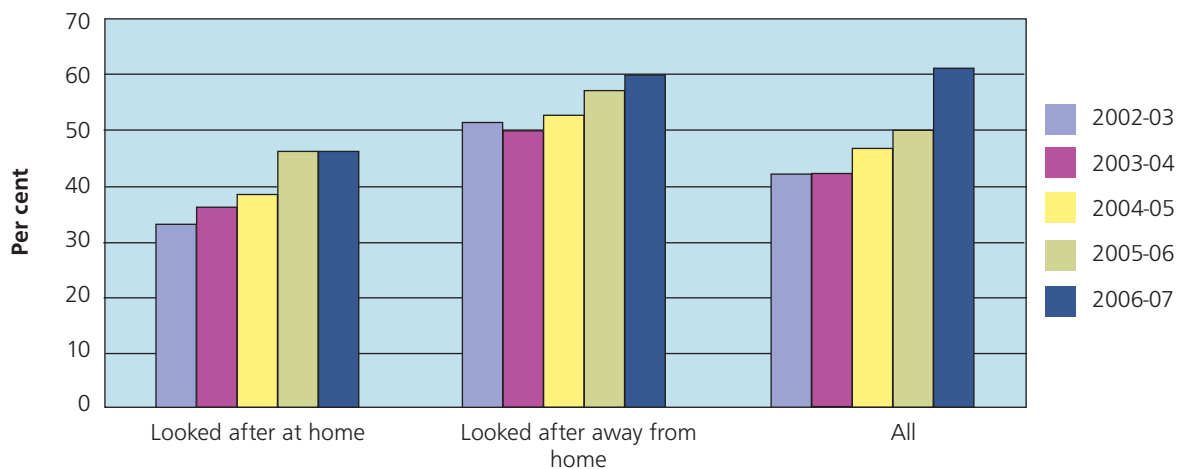
Over the period 2002-03 to 2006-07, there has been an upward trend in this statistic. The figures for children looked after at home, however, consistently lag behind those for children looked after away from home. This disadvantage continues post school with only a very small percentage of looked after children moving on to university compared to the general population of young people.

⁶ *How good is our school? The Journey to Excellence*, HMIE, 2006, Parts 1 and 2, ISBN 0 7053 1083 5, Part 3 ISBN 978 0 7053 1102 1.

⁷ *Extraordinary Lives, Celebrating Success: What helps make looked after children succeed*, Social Work Inspection Agency, 2006, ISBN 1 905501 09 9.

⁸ *Residential Care and Education: Improving practice in residential special schools and secure care accommodation services in Scotland*, Care Commission and HMIE 2007 ISBN: 978 0 7053 1115 1.

Percentage of care leavers beyond minimum school leaving age with at least one qualification of SCQF level 3 or above, 2002-03 to 2006-07 at the point of leaving care



There is a need to improve the levels of attainment of looked after children against a wider range of other demanding benchmarks. Relatively small proportions of looked after children ultimately benefit from further and higher education, and a relatively high proportion become unemployed. We need to increase our efforts to overcome the barriers to achievement that confront looked after children and young people to improve their outcomes and life chances.

Looked after children have higher exclusion rates than other pupils which can result in them missing out on education for periods of time. The table below shows exclusion statistics for

2006-07⁹. The final column compares exclusion rates per 1,000 pupils for children looked after at home, looked after away from home and those not looked after by a local authority. Looked after children at home had lower exclusion rates than looked after children away from home. Evidence from school inspections and interviews indicated that school staff are not fully aware of who their looked after children living at home are, consequently the figures for these children may be significantly underestimated. This may help to explain the apparent paradox that while children looked after at home appear to have lower exclusion rates than those looked after away from home, they also have lower levels of attainment.

⁹ Source: *Exclusions From Schools 2006/07*, Scottish Government, ISSN 1479-7569 (online)

Exclusions amongst pupils looked after by local authorities, 2006-07

	Number of Exclusions	Number of Temporary Exclusions	Rate per 1,000 pupils
Looked after children	3,787	3,767	368
Of which at home	2,505	2,495	358
away from home	1,282	1,272	380
Not looked after by local authority	40,900	40,779	60

Data was collected on whether a child was looked after by the local authority at the time of their exclusion from school. Figures for the number of pupils who have been looked after at any point during the year are not collected centrally. It has therefore been necessary to calculate rates based on those pupils who were looked after at the time of the census.

The *Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Scotland, Regulations and Guidance*¹⁰ places emphasis on the importance of planning pathways for the future development of children and young people. It is disappointing, therefore, that figures for 31 March 2007 show that only 55% of care leavers who were beyond the minimum leaving age had a nominated pathways coordinator¹¹ and only 50% had a pathways plan¹².

Inspectors visited a range of local authorities and voluntary sector providers with the aim of identifying what is working well, and what

issues are challenging services. Throughout the report we discuss the current challenges and give examples of good practice. The Looked After Children Education Forum provides a national network for professionals working to improve educational outcomes for Scotland's looked after children and young people, particularly in the implementation of ***we can and must do better***. National approaches to highlighting effective practice and identifying how services and outcomes for looked after children can be improved have made some progress, but require to be developed further.

¹⁰ *Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Scotland, Regulations and Guidance*, Scottish Executive 2004, ISBN 0 7559 41551

¹¹ The person responsible for taking forward transition planning for a young person leaving care.

¹² This describes how the local authority plans to meet the young person's needs.



02

WHAT WE DID

This report aims to build on the earlier reports and policy initiatives referred to in Chapter 1 by taking a closer look at practice in improving educational outcomes for looked after children.

In 2006, HMIE distributed a questionnaire to all local authorities as part of the task *Children at Risk of Missing Out*. They were asked to provide information on how they were addressing the needs of young people at risk of missing out on education. These included young carers, young people experiencing health difficulties, teenage parents and looked after children and young people. The majority of local authorities returned very detailed responses. These provided a useful starting point for this task. An analysis of the data highlighted some of the good practice nationally and identified issues and barriers to progress.

A team of inspectors visited 15 local authorities. Inspectors conducted interviews with Chief Executives, senior staff and elected members in

almost all authorities, designated staff and teachers, partner agencies including voluntary sector staff, children and young people and a small sample of parents and carers. The views of children and young people are reflected in the content of the report.

The visits also included some focus groups, observations of practice and attendance at meetings. Inspectors used a flexible approach and responded to suggestions from local authorities with the aim of capturing exemplars of good practice. Inspectors also read supporting evidence and documentation.

In addition to the evidence gained from the fieldwork visits arranged with local authorities, contact was made with voluntary organisations and Careers Scotland to take a closer look at some of their provision. Relevant evidence from recent inspection reports was also considered. A summary of the main findings are contained in Chapter 4.

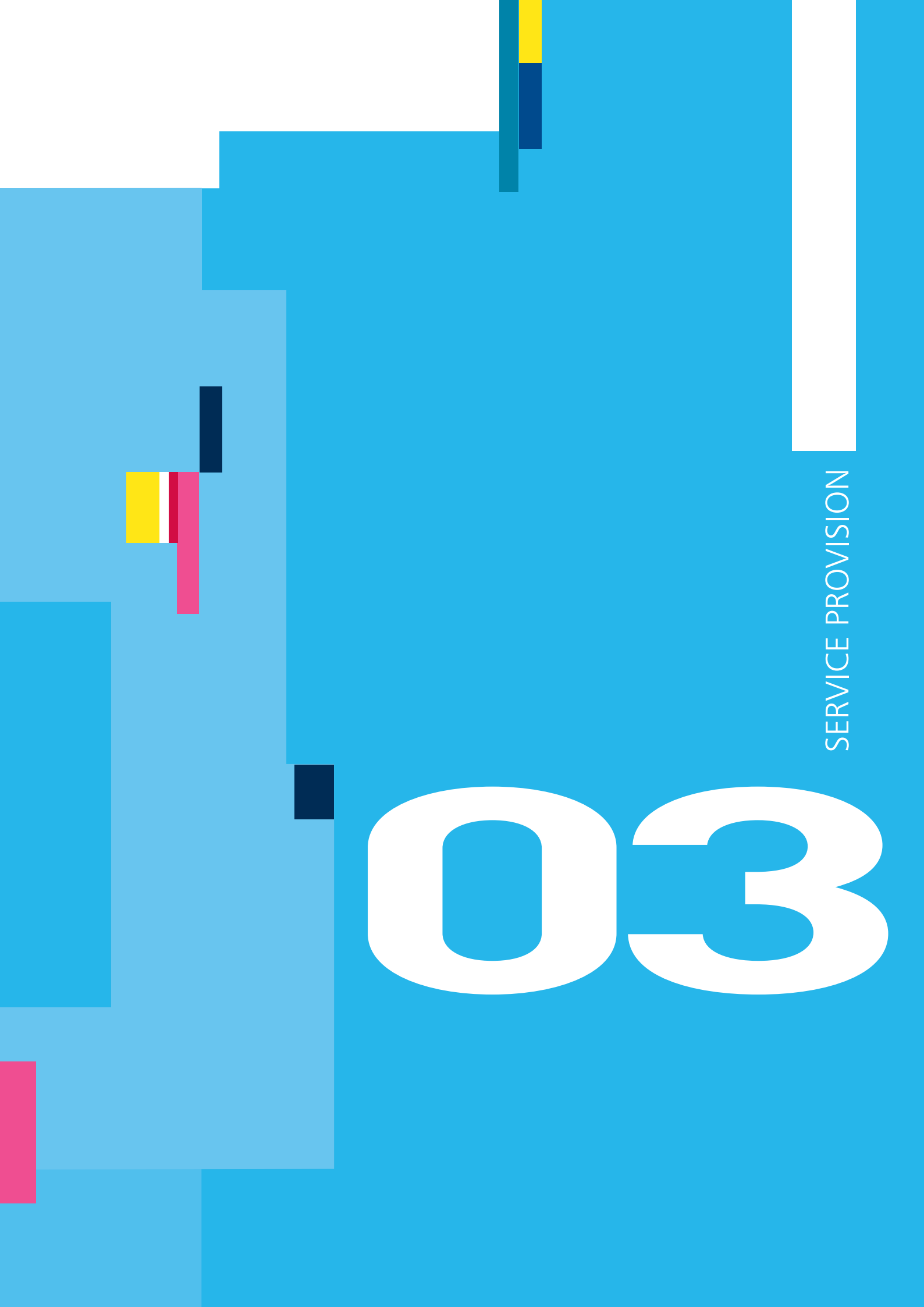






03

SERVICE PROVISION



This chapter presents the main findings and good practice examples from the inspection visits under headings which relate to important aspects of service provision for looked after children.

3.1 CORPORATE PARENTING

It is now widely recognised that the corporate parenting role is challenging but crucial in improving outcomes for looked after children. Formally defined, the corporate parent role is characterised by the formal and informal partnerships needed between all local authority services and partner agencies who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and young people.

The Scottish Government report, *Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better* has the following to say about the corporate parenting role:

'Second best is not good enough for Scotland's looked after children and young people. As corporate parents, local authorities have a challenging role, and acting like good parents and being aware of the needs of their children and young people must be a key priority. In discharging their corporate parenting responsibilities, they need to put and keep the needs of the child or young person at the centre of everything they do. It is essential that the individual agencies who form the corporate parent for Scotland's looked after children and young people are more aware and alert to their children's needs and work together to deliver them.'

Extraordinary Lives, SWIA, 2006 stressed the importance of the corporate parenting role:

'We have concluded that the single most important thing that will improve the futures of Scotland's looked after children is for local authorities to improve their corporate parenting skills.'

What we found

All local authorities visited were making good progress overall in developing their corporate parenting role. Chief executives and senior officials demonstrated a strong commitment to improving outcomes for looked after children with their community planning partners and had a clear vision for improvement. Most elected members also showed commitment to looked after children, but some were unclear about the Council's vision and their responsibilities as a corporate parent. Some authorities had provided training for elected members to raise their awareness.

Senior staff and elected members in one authority were committed to improving the life chances of looked after children and had identified and addressed a number of areas for improvement. These included seminars on corporate parenting responsibilities designed to raise awareness among elected members.

However, not all staff at operational levels were aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities, particularly in relation to looked after children living at home. Too often teaching staff did not know who were the looked after children in the school. As a result, relevant information was not always shared, which had an impact on how well the individual needs of looked after children were being met. Local authorities need to develop more effective systems for raising awareness of and tracking looked after children, in particular those looked after at home. The Scottish Government is working in partnership with local authorities to develop a more effective data collection and reporting framework.

Senior staff recognised that having high expectations and aspirations for looked after children was part of the corporate parenting role, and an important factor in improving outcomes for children. Good practice was identified in a few authorities where senior officers recognised the achievements of their looked after children through direct contact or by sending a letter of congratulations. Some authorities were beginning to develop schemes

to further enhance their corporate parenting role through, for example, linking senior staff to individual looked after children with a view to address barriers to learning.

One authority had recognised a need to strengthen its corporate parenting role through the establishment of an Education Champions scheme. Senior officers agreed to support individual looked after children to overcome barriers to learning as they approached exams. Acting in a parental role, the senior officer tracks the young person's progress and links with his or her key worker to ensure that appropriate provision is put in place to remove any barriers to progress.

Most authorities visited had taken steps to ensure that a senior member of staff had overall responsibility for monitoring and tracking the progress of looked after children and had appointed dedicated staff, including additional teachers, at classroom level. This worked well where multi-agency teams had been established to meet the holistic needs of looked after children and young people.

A multi-disciplinary team of professionals had been established in one authority. Team members were able to meet the holistic needs of looked after children and provide support to parents and carers. This approach resulted in barriers to learning being removed at an early stage through, for example, to addressing health issues. Information-sharing and communication between professionals and parents and carers had improved as a result. The team played an important role in building the capacity of other staff by delivering training and offering advice and support. As a result, teaching staff were clear about their corporate parenting role and worked effectively with other agencies to support the individual needs of looked after children and to remove barriers to learning.

A few authorities had established effective structures for looked after children to express

their views and to influence planning and decision making. This included the establishment of specific forums for looked after children and the provision of opportunities for children and young people to speak directly to senior officials and elected members.

Almost all authorities visited provided staff to support children and young people with advocacy or worked in partnership with *Who Cares? Scotland* to achieve this. Barnardo's Scotland had also appointed participation workers to promote the involvement of looked after children and young people in decision making.

Part of the corporate parenting role includes ensuring that looked after children are not excluded from participation by financial constraints. Most authorities have recognised this and provide practical support for looked after children, including financial assistance to take part in activities and to purchase books and school equipment. Some authorities had provided children with access to computing equipment through, for example, installing computers in children's homes. Some authorities had invested in improving the environment for young people living in residential care. Financial and practical support is of particular importance when young people are moving through transition from leaving care to independence as young adults.

The authority had made substantial investment in schools and children's accommodation to create rich environments. Looked after children living in residential accommodation had been directly involved in decisions regarding the internal design and decoration of their accommodation. Financial support was provided to looked after children to enable them to participate in both school and out of school activities. This included an opportunity for all children and young people looked after in children's houses the opportunity to take part in a holiday abroad. Additional evening homework support was provided through the funding of teachers in children's houses.

Local authorities and their partners can improve the quality and effectiveness of their corporate parenting role by:

- > working closely as community planning partners in a shared responsibility for looked after children;
- > providing training to ensure that all elected members and relevant staff are aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities;
- > improving monitoring, tracking and information sharing on looked after children so that they know who their looked after children are, where they are, and how well they are doing;
- > promoting positive attitudes and high expectations for looked after children and by recognising and celebrating their achievements;
- > establishing appropriate targets for the attainment of looked after children in Single Outcome Agreements;
- > providing support which nurtures children and young people and builds their resilience; and
- > providing appropriate financial and practical support for looked after children throughout their education and in their transition to adulthood.

3.2 PARTNERSHIPS

What we found

Partnership working between services and agencies was well developed in most authorities. A range of multi-disciplinary groups had been established to support partnership working at both strategic and operational levels. These included Additional Support Needs management groups, Joint Area Liaison Groups, School Liaison Groups, Youth Justice Assessment and Referral Groups, Chief Officers Groups and others. This had led to some improvements in information sharing and communication between staff working with looked after children and their parents and carers. However, sometimes, key partners including health and social work said that they found it difficult to make a positive contribution to partnership working due to limited staff resources.

The implementation of integrated working was at different stages of development in local authorities. Progress in joint planning and working between education, social services, health, local colleges, Careers Scotland and the voluntary sector was evident and had led to a wide range of partnership initiatives. However, in some areas partners had yet to develop effective systems for monitoring and evaluating

the impact of inter-agency planning and working on improving outcomes for looked after children.

A project had been set up by an authority in partnership with a local college to meet the needs of individual young people, including looked after children. The project provided a flexible curriculum, based in the college, with a focus on literacy and numeracy. The service supported approximately 30 young people in their final year of compulsory education. It was staffed by council support staff and college lecturers. All students had an individual learning plan, which was negotiated with the young person. The project had recently been expanded to include younger pupils who were not coping in mainstream, the aim being to reduce the number of pupils being excluded or placed in residential schools.

Looked after children multi-agency teams had been established in a number of authorities which had resulted in the holistic needs of looked after children being identified and addressed more effectively. This included removal of some of the barriers to learning such as health issues.

Local authority partnership with voluntary agencies had led to the development of a range of programmes which provided additional learning opportunities and support to children, young people, parents and carers. There was potential to develop stronger links with the voluntary sector in authorities to achieve better outcomes for children and young people.

In one authority, an effective partnership had been established with a voluntary organisation to support parents and carers, including those of looked after children, to develop their confidence and skills. As a result, they had gained a clearer understanding of child development and acquired strategies for dealing with challenging behaviour. They were given opportunities to meet with other parents and share experiences to reduce their feelings of isolation. Some reported having greater confidence as parents, and that support networks were established in their local communities. Parents also supported their children with homework and in sharing and enjoying joint activities, including reading. This had led to the development of more positive attitudes to education and improved links with their children's schools. The work with parents linked effectively with the nurture groups operating in schools that helped their children to develop confidence, resilience and independent living skills.

Lack of accommodation and problems with access in some schools created difficulties in providing some services delivered by partner agencies, including health. The accommodation in some schools also restricted the amount of individual teaching and behavioural support which could be offered to meet the needs of looked after children.

Partnership with parents, carers and young people was a priority in most authorities and some progress had been made in involving them in planning and review processes. In a few authorities where effective partnerships had been established between teachers and residential care staff. This had led to improved communication and information-sharing regarding difficulties.

Effective partnerships had been established between teachers and residential care staff in some authorities. This included the use of outreach teachers who targeted young people living in children's units whose attendance at school was poor. They worked in partnership with care staff to share information and provide learning support and advice to young people in the units. This had the positive impact of giving young people consistent messages, encouraged care staff to assist with homework, and promoted positive attitudes to education. As a result, young people felt more confident and had increased motivation to learn and succeed. Outreach staff also directed young people into other learning opportunities provided by community learning and development, college programmes and work placements.



Local authorities and their partners can improve the quality and effectiveness of partnership working to support looked after children by:

- > engaging with appropriate local agencies and organisations to establish effective partnerships and good communication systems that will assist in meeting the holistic needs of, and improving outcomes for, looked after children;
- > building improved links with voluntary sector organisations to provide a wide range of support services for looked after children;
- > ensuring that partners within the local Community Planning Partnership are clear about their roles and responsibilities and have a shared understanding and agreement regarding the outcomes they want to achieve for looked after children;
- > building into joint planning arrangements, effective systems for evaluating the impact of partnership working; and
- > promoting active partnerships with children, young people and their parents and carers which involve them in planning and review of services.

3.3 STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REVIEW

Very effective integrated working is needed to support looked after children who require support from a number of agencies. In 2001, *Learning with Care* recommended that:

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

What we found

Overall, local authorities had made good efforts to improve joint planning for children's services and involve their partners including health, police, Careers Scotland, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration and voluntary sector organisations.

One authority had set up a Joint Strategic Support Unit which was a key strength in very effective joint planning and working. The Unit, under the leadership of the principal planning officer for children's services, included the child protection

officer, a domestic abuse prevention officer, an education planning officer, a community police youth justice officer, a housing planning officer, the looked after children link teacher and a social work planning officer. The co-location of these staff had strengthened inter-departmental working, added value and increased effective communication.

A few authorities had created a Children's Services Department, which joined education and social work services under the leadership of one executive director. Other authorities, having considered this approach, believed that it was more effective to retain separate departments, but with a clear and effective approach to joint working. Almost all authorities had established a post with responsibility for the leadership of integrated children's services. Staff in these posts coordinated and facilitated strategic planning and review between agencies. Some authorities had established shared posts using joint funding, in the case of one local authority with a NHS health board.

In most of the authorities visited, the needs of looked after children were included in the strategic planning priorities. In the most effective examples, looked after children were included in the planning and review process.

The authority had included meeting the needs of looked after children in its strategic planning and ensured that the vision and priorities were shared by all staff. Teaching staff were clear about their corporate parenting responsibilities and schools had positive attitudes and high aspirations for their looked after children. Staff recognised and celebrated the achievements of looked after children to build the confidence and increase the motivation of these children and young people.

Increasingly, local authorities were using quality frameworks to evaluate the delivery of services for children and young people. This provided them with more robust evidence of the effectiveness of their services for looked after children.

A self-evaluation framework for looked after children had been introduced in one authority visited. This was organised around the themes of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Drawing on a range of sources, including: quality indicators developed by HMIE, National Care Standards, recommendations in Learning with Care, Joint Practice Guidelines and the local authority Integrated Children's Services Plan, the authority had identified quality indicators. Using these and associated sources of evidence, it had evaluated the impact and benefit of services for looked after children. The impact and benefits included: better performance data and measures showing trends over time; more appropriate individual learning plans; and better performance against aims, objectives and targets.

SIGNPOSTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Local authorities and their partners can improve the quality and effectiveness of strategic planning and review related to services for looked after children by:

- > establishing a clear shared vision and priorities to improve outcomes for looked after children;
- > ensuring that planning and review of services related to looked after children is embedded within wider arrangements for planning and review of services for children;
- > ensuring rigorous and systematic approaches to the evaluation of services for looked after children; and
- > creating structures for looked after children to have a voice and to influence planning and review.

3.4 ASSESSING AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The importance of a rigorous and multi-disciplinary approach to identifying and meeting the needs of looked after children was recognised in *Learning with Care*. Indeed, the first recommendation was that:

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

The report *Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better* also recognised the importance of this theme by saying:

'Raising awareness of the educational needs of looked after children and young people amongst school, social work, parents, foster carers and residential workers is essential.'

and stating that:

'School based supports are central to providing continuity and security, which in return are essential prerequisites for effective learning to take place.'

What we found

A few of the authorities visited had combined the assessment of the needs of looked after children with their procedures for implementing the *Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act 2004*. The HMIE Report *Implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act, 2004*¹³ indicated that almost all authorities used a model of staged intervention¹⁴ or staged assessment to guide and support their assessment and resource allocation. The report also stated that services for children, including Education Authorities, as intended in the legislation and embodied in good practice, should plan support services more clearly around the individuals whose needs are being addressed. A few authorities had combined their approaches to staged intervention with those of Health Trusts and social work. In schools, Joint Assessment Teams (JATs) or School Liaison Groups (SLGs) offered approaches to meeting needs that focused on finding solutions and overcoming barriers.

In one school visited a Joint Assessment Team (JAT) met monthly to consider the needs of pupils experiencing significant difficulties. This was a multi-agency forum which had direct access to a forum which provided additional resources or consider placement in a residential school. The school retained contact with pupils placed in residential schools and continued to monitor their progress in anticipation of their return. There was a less formal review group which met as required to consider pupils who were beginning to cause concern. A flexible curriculum was available to pupils experiencing learning problems. This included extended work experience within a fully inclusive school where there was a clear emphasis on personal growth through achievement.

In the best practice, an inter-agency approach, using standing multi-disciplinary groups meeting on a regular basis in schools, consider the needs of looked after children with educational difficulties. Almost all authorities had developed such inter-agency planning and review groups in their secondary schools. The majority of authorities had made arrangements to enable multi-agency consideration of looked after children of primary school age experiencing educational difficulties. Multi-agency groups, meeting on a regular basis, can encourage positive engagement with looked after children and their parents and carers. Critically, these arrangements provide an opportunity to deal with emerging problems at an early stage. For such arrangements to be fully effective and to facilitate ongoing monitoring of progress, it is important that decisions taken and any actions agreed are recorded. It is crucial that education contributes effectively to the review process for looked after children through regular attendance at review meetings, submission of reports and commitment to fulfilling actions agreed.

One authority had adopted a fully integrated approach to addressing the health needs of looked after children by appointing a Looked After Children (LAC) Clinical Coordinator. The LAC Clinical Coordinator had full access to health records, the social work database and the education management information system. This facilitated effective sharing of information and allowed specific health assessments, for example of sexual health needs, and ensured that looked after children had access to appropriate dental health care. Regular monthly updates were provided to the school nurse, local doctors, community paediatricians, and the child protection advisor. School nurses monitored attendance of looked after children.

¹³ *Report on Implementation of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act, 2004*, HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007, ISBN 978 0 7053 1125 0

¹⁴ Within a multi-agency approach, 'staged intervention' is the process used to identify and respond to the needs of children and families with additional support needs. The level of intervention required is measured against different levels of criteria according to the degree of need.

Personal Health Plans which identified the distinct health and medical needs of looked after children were presented at looked after children reviews. All looked after children were issued with a young person's guide to Staying healthy – feeling good¹⁵. Relevant staff were issued with a guide to meeting the health requirements of looked after children. If a looked after child moved into a different health board area the LAC Clinical Coordinator contacted the relevant staff to ensure that they were aware of the move and of the health needs of the child.

While good progress was being made in devising models for supporting looked after children, more needed to be done to improve the joint assessment of these needs so that support and resources can be more effectively targeted, in line with the GIRFEC national programme.

A Children and Families Department had been created in one authority and had begun to make an impact at school level. In a secondary school visited, children and family support staff worked effectively in partnership with teaching staff to address and meet the needs of looked after children. Staff from social work and community learning and development offered complementary approaches which enhanced the support systems available for young people. A systematic approach to identifying the needs of young people had been successfully implemented which included referrals from associated primary schools, pupil support groups and social work practice groups. Young people from S4 upwards were able to self-refer. The contribution of other professionals had also led to an enhancement in informal learning opportunities available to young people and recognition of wider achievements.

Local authorities and their partners can improve the effectiveness of the ways in which they assess and meet the needs of looked after children by:

SIGNPOSTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- > ensuring that all relevant services are involved jointly in identifying and meeting the needs of the children;
- > ensuring that, wherever feasible, children are given a voice in helping to identify and meet their needs;
- > using strategic joint approaches to ensure that support methods are built on the best of practice and that the necessary resources are brought to bear on children's problems at the earliest possible stage;
- > having effective systems for sharing information across partner agencies about the needs of looked after children, the support being provided and the children's response to that support;
- > improving approaches to meeting the educational needs of excluded pupils; and
- > ensuring that the needs of looked after children looked after at home with their birth parents or other family members receive the same levels of support as those in residential placements.

¹⁵ *Staying healthy – feeling good*, DfES Publications 2004, ISBN 1 84478 248 4

3.5 EDUCATION PLACEMENT AND CURRICULUM FLEXIBILITY

'It is widely accepted that as a group, looked after children perform less well at school; when compared to the general school population their attendance rates are lower, their exclusion rates are higher and their academic attainment is lower.'

'Learning environments need flexibility in order to provide not only effective academic support but also opportunities for personal and social support.'

Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better

What we found

Most local education authorities were making significant investment in enhancing the mainstream educational experience of looked after children with a range of additional support needs. Most of the authorities visited had a range of alternative curriculum arrangements in place to support looked after children who were experiencing difficulty in mainstream education.

Nurture groups for looked after children had been established in some primary schools visited. The groups were well resourced by Scottish and local government funding and offered short-term programmes. They offered a context and a model of relationships for children who were not benefiting sufficiently from essential early learning experiences. The intervention was part of a whole school and authority approach to supporting children, with the objective of achieving ongoing inclusion within mainstream classes. A secure environment which met the needs of individual pupils was provided. There was an emphasis on supporting positive emotional and social growth and cognitive development of the individual child. Communication and language development was encouraged through intensive one-to-one interaction with an adult or another child. Social learning took place through cooperation and play with other children. Nurture groups

offered an inclusive early intervention and prevention approach to supporting vulnerable children within a mainstream setting. They provided a balance of learning and teaching with a recognition of the social and emotional needs of vulnerable children within a home-like environment. This initiative had a positive impact on the lives of looked after children, including improving their confidence and self esteem and developing social skills.

Service integration enabled the care and educational needs of looked after children to be met in more effective ways.

One authority visited had established a very effective multi-agency LAC Team, which provided specialist support and worked with social workers, residential staff and foster carers. Team members responded quickly and effectively to looked after children's education and care needs. The young person's development worker engaged with agencies to provide personal and social development activities, promoted citizenship, and facilitate inter-agency training. The team promoted confidence and self esteem through PACE (Physical Activity for Confidence and Esteem), funded by the Scottish Government. The public health nurse provided health interventions, and medical care, advice and information to young people and their carers. The educational psychologist provided advice to carers and staff, supported individual looked after children, contributed to looked after children reviews and provided training and support to staff from different services. Working with individuals and small groups, the outreach teachers focused on raising attainment, promoting achievement and supporting children at points of transition. The children's rights officer provided information and advice on children's rights, advocacy services, and helped children to express their views more effectively.

Where alternative educational provision was made offsite, the quality of the educational experience was variable. Provision ranged from placements in specialist settings of high quality either on a day or residential basis to more informal alternative educational programmes which offered a less structured curriculum within a shortened school week. Plans were often not in place to re-integrate such young people into mainstream provision following placements.

A voluntary organisation visited provided a range of services including a high quality therapeutic residential experience. There was a strong emphasis on promoting the value of education. Children and young people were assessed to identify their educational needs. One of the key principles was that looked after children who had previously attended special residential schools were supported within a community setting which enabled them to attend mainstream schools. There was a positive and effective partnership with the local authority which resulted in all the looked after children being placed in local schools. Staff engaged positively with local schools, and provided support as and when required. This provision resulted in significant numbers of looked after children gaining national qualifications, with most leaving school having gained several Standard Grades. The organisation placed a high priority on staff development, which included the offer of training and development opportunities to local authority staff.

Some authorities had reduced the exclusion rates of looked after children through a policy of not excluding looked after children from school. There was a growing recognition among staff interviewed that there was a need to take account of the challenges and barriers to learning faced by looked after children and deal with their behaviour and attitudes more sensitively than before.

Young people interviewed told us of the importance of having access to effective support within school. Looked after children need to have a trusting adult who they can trust and to whom they can express their concerns and who will listen and take their concerns seriously. Most young people felt that they could readily approach support staff in school, but also saw youth workers and school nurses as individuals who could provide them with support, information and advice.

Internal communication was a particular strength in one school visited, where concerns about individual pupils were readily shared amongst teaching and support staff. A volunteer mentoring scheme, introduced several years ago, involved individual teachers in mentoring pupils who were experiencing difficulties, including looked after children. Mentors worked with pupils to help them recognise their strengths, develop their skills, improve their levels of attainment, set realistic targets and recognise and record their positive achievements. Mentoring addressed areas of pupil development relating to their school work. They were able to check their homework diaries and discuss possible workload issues. Pupils were also given the opportunity to discuss matters arising from their life in and out of school which affected their learning. Involvement in broader learning experiences including sporting, musical, artistic, social and work-related activities were recognised and celebrated. Both teachers and pupils contributed to the internal evaluation of the scheme.

Good practice was identified in some schools where young people were directly involved in negotiating their own curriculum and in setting and reviewing targets, Personal learning planning was used effectively to identify both educational outcomes and personal development goals. This approach had a positive impact in raising young people's motivation and in building their awareness of their learning.

Young people living in residential care provided by a voluntary organisation were confident that their education was given high priority by the staff who looked after them. Staff provided effective support through responding to crises in school, making sure homework was completed, and by promoting and supporting improvements in their behaviour. One young person who had a special interest in music was helped by a small specialist project run by the same organisation. This enabled him to attend singing lessons and to achieve his Standard Grade. Another young person described how the residential staff made sure that he had a good routine for ensuring regular attendance at school. Both were aware of the work that staff did to support

them, and thought this helped them to succeed. Fundamental to their success were the high expectations of the staff who looked after them who encouraged them to reach their full potential.

It is recognised that looked after children are often moved from one placement to another. When this results in school changes. This can have a detrimental effect on educational attainment. However, local authorities were making efforts to address this issue.

Commendably, some local authorities visited provided transport to enable pupils who had moved into care or changed placements to remain in the same school wherever possible.

Local authorities and their partners can improve the quality of educational experience of looked after children by:

SIGNPOSTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- > striving to remove barriers to learning, with the aim of maintaining looked after children within mainstream school;
- > using the flexibility provided by *Curriculum for Excellence* to provide a more personalised curriculum which is structured around meeting the needs of the individual child/young person;
- > recording young people's wider achievements, including Youth Achievement Awards, ASDAN, Duke of Edinburgh Award, on their management information systems and in pupil progress files;
- > ensuring that alternative educational placements provide educationally rich environments and a relevant curriculum through which young people can reach their full potential;
- > working together to assure the quality of the educational experience of looked after children, particularly where education is provided off-site;
- > minimising the disruption to education caused by exclusion from school, and providing ongoing education and support when short/medium term exclusion is necessary;
- > providing access to health checks and sex education programmes which looked after children may have missed due to changes in placements and schools; and
- > ensuring a planned approach to re-integrating looked after children back into mainstream provision.

3.6 PARTICIPATION AND ADVOCACY

'The participation of children and young people in decisions which affect them is a principle that has found much support in recent years on an international, national and local level. At its broadest international level, support and motivation for the participation of children and young people in all aspects of their lives is most clearly provided through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).'

'At its broadest, advocacy is understood as the provision of information, explanations, support, simple encouragement to participate, or direct advocacy by way of representation.'

'The relationship between advocacy and participation is crucial. It is apparent in terms of Article 12 of the UNCRC that, if children and young people are to be able to participate in a meaningful way, they require information, support, sometimes encouragement to be their own advocate and at other times appropriate representation. The important issue is that children's and young people's needs in this crucial area are themselves seen as relevant and a right which others have a duty to fulfil.'

Getting it right for every child¹⁶

The participation of looked after children at times of key decision-making affecting their lives is a statutory requirement.

What we found

Best practice was found when there was open discussion with young people about the options available and opportunities for negotiated outcomes. This is especially important at times of transition to ensure continuity of support through significant experiences of change.

The authority had set up an Education Champions Scheme and established, a reference group of looked after children and young people to oversee progress. This provided young people with an opportunity to express their views. Although in the early stages of development, the programme had already improved staff attitudes towards looked after children and raised awareness of their needs.

The 'Having your Say' looked after children youth forum was established in one authority in 2000 and since then it has been expanded to include forums for looked after children and young people in different age groups. The forums provide looked after children and young people with a voice and a structure to influence decisions. The children and young people involved have explored a range of issues impacting on their lives and have produced a very powerful video which highlights their experiences. They also give children and young people an opportunity to meet other looked after children and to enjoy a range of social activities. Some quotes from the looked after children forum: When asked what had worked well in school young people gave the following responses:

'School not giving up on me.'

'Getting on with teachers.'

When asked what they would change, they said:

'A trusted teacher I could pick myself to attend my review meetings.'

'The judgemental attitude of some teachers ... just because you're looked after.'

'There should be a level playing field ... treat looked after children the same as other children.'

'Teachers shouldn't use stereotypes.'

¹⁶ *Getting it right for every child – Children's and young people's experience of advocacy support and participation in the Children's Hearing System: Big Words and Big Tables*, Scottish Executive 2006, ISBN 0 759 5042 9

The Psychology Service in one authority had developed a project to address two important issues: the need to consult with children and young people over the services provided by the council and the need to achieve the best outcomes possible for looked after children and young people. Research was carried out to obtain the views of young people resident in the council's Young People's Centres (YPCs). The young people were keen to talk about their day-to-day experiences of living in YPCs. This project empowered a group of young people to express their views. They are now having an impact on other young people living in YPC settings.

Many looked after children living in residential care and school settings had access to an advocacy service from a Children's Rights worker and/or a *Who Cares? Scotland* worker. This was not always the case for children in foster care and children looked after at home.

Voluntary sector services had created a range of effective opportunities for the voice of looked after children to be heard. For example, the Advocacy Service provided by one voluntary organisation aimed to make a difference to the lives of vulnerable children, young people and their families by providing an independent accessible service which ensured they were aware of their rights. The organisation provided a community based advocacy service for children and young people in one local authority. Young people were very positive about the service which had led to increased confidence and improved self-esteem.

Most school based multi-agency planning and intervention groups in the local authorities visited ensured that young people and their parents and/or carers were consulted. Those multi-disciplinary group meetings observed by inspectors provided clear evidence of young people being listened to in a positive atmosphere where there was a clear focus on finding solutions to any difficulties.

SIGNPOSTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Local authorities and their partners can improve the participation of looked after children in decisions which affect their lives by:

- > drawing on the advice and support of agencies specialising in advocacy for children and young people;
- > providing services to ensure that there are formal and meaningful opportunities for all looked after children to be consulted about the range and quality of services being offered to them;
- > ensuring the different needs of looked after children in residential schools, in foster care and kinship care placements, and those looked after at home are understood and reflected in appropriate arrangements for supporting their advocacy and encouraging their participation in decision-making; and
- > dealing with the particular obstacles to advocacy and communication which may face some looked after children with disabilities.

3.7 TRANSITIONS

‘What can be challenging times for all children and young people – the transition from pre-school to primary school; the transition from primary to secondary school; the transition to post-school; subject choice; sitting exams; making decisions which affect future career options – can be particularly difficult for those looked after children who may also be coping with difficult family circumstances; a change of home; a change of school; or, as they reach adulthood, how they will cope living on their own.’

Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better

‘Compared with other young people, those leaving care are more likely to: have poor educational outcomes and access to further and higher education; experience low-paid employment or unemployment; have problems with health, particularly mental health, conduct disorders, and misuse of alcohol and drugs; have difficulties with relationships with family and friends; be young parents; and feel affected by stigma and prejudice. Young people who are making a transition from being looked after to independent living are therefore particularly disadvantaged in terms of many factors which might facilitate this process.’

Review of Research on Vulnerable Young People and their Transitions to Independent Living¹⁷

‘Local authorities, together with their partners, will collectively plan and articulate the training and support for 16-19 year olds they will guarantee to deliver in their area. Building on their statutory duty to plan for the employability of young people who will cease to be looked after, this will make specific reference to the support and provision available to care leavers.’

*More Choices, More Chances
Scottish Executive 2006*

The Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Scotland: Regulations and Guidance¹⁸ state that local authorities have a corporate parenting duty to prepare young people for leaving care and living independently. This document, among other things, contains guidance on the preparation of young people for ceasing to be looked after (‘throughcare’) and the provision of advice, guidance and assistance for young people over school age who have ceased to be looked after (‘aftercare’).

What we found

Planning for transition was well developed in some authorities, but remains a significant area for improvement. Some local authorities had well-managed arrangements in place for the transition from pre-school to primary and from primary to secondary and had revised their guidelines to articulate with the recommendations of the *Additional Support For Learning Act Code of Practice¹⁹*. In good practice, these arrangements were clearly linked to staged intervention frameworks. Mentors, family support workers and specialist teachers with a remit for looked after children effectively supported young people, parents and carers. However, arrangements for post-school transitions were not so rigorous or robust, or known to service partners outwith education. Most local authorities visited had not yet developed effective policies and procedures for children moving to higher and further education, including what financial support they would receive, how this would be administered, and how emotional support would be provided.

¹⁷ *Review of Research on Vulnerable Young People and their Transitions to Independent Living*, Scottish Executive Social Research, 2007, ISBN 978 0 7559 67320.

¹⁸ *Supporting Young People Leaving Care in Scotland: Regulations and Guidance*, Scottish Executive 2004, ISBN 0 7559 4155 1.

¹⁹ *Supporting Children’s Learning Code of Practice*, Scottish Executive 2005, ISBN 0 7559 4624 3.

Children who were looked after were not always identified as part of the staged intervention process, particularly children looked after at home. In many cases, looked after children undergo a number of changes of school and placement, as well as being subject to school exclusions. These significant transitions, which did not take place at normal transition points between primary and secondary or secondary and post school, were not uniformly managed with the required care and attention. This resulted in young people not accessing work, training or further education opportunities.

In one authority, Careers Scotland had a dedicated care-leaver team with careers advisers and key workers who worked closely with social work and other partners. There was an agreement with all colleges within the area to work jointly to support vulnerable young people. This college partnership agreement worked by linking the key worker who supported the young person with support services in the colleges. By working together with the young person, they eased the transition process and helped to sustain the young person in the college placement. Careers Scotland and the colleges met twice a year to address any difficulties

Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better makes two specific recommendations regarding transition arrangements:

- > Action 10 recommends the commissioning of 'guidance and a practical resource which will focus on those looked after children and young people who have experienced, or who are likely to experience, a challenging transition'; and
- > Action 14 recommends the preparation of 'a resource pack for looked after young people and care leavers which will provide them with information relevant to their transition into adulthood.'

These resources, once available, should help local authorities and their partner agencies to address many of the current gaps in provision related to transition for looked after children.

A voluntary organisation worked effectively in partnership with local authorities to provide effective support to looked after children experiencing both care and education difficulties. The organisation's staff and carers worked closely with staff from the local authorities, colleges, NHS and voluntary sector to ensure that the holistic needs of young people were met. Inter-agency transitional planning set targets in full consultation with looked after children. This resulted in the setting of clear aspirations for the future and the recognition of achievements. The organisation ensured that young people continued to have access to 'more choices and more chances' through continuing education once a young person left school.

In some cases there were delays in putting appropriate resources in place, despite young people being known to agencies for a number of years in advance of transition. Feedback from carers in two authorities recognised that services were not operating in an integrated way. In good practice, education staff, parents, carers and social work staff shared information and planning around care and education issues. Increasingly, staff from the careers service, acting as key workers, were being used effectively to support looked after children through the post-school transition and to expand opportunities for vocational experiences for this group.

One local authority ran a Youthstart initiative which helped young people to gain and sustain employment. It provided a range of client-centred, targeted activities and had developed extensive networks to assist young people to make informed choices and achieve positive progression. Staff helped young people to develop a vocational profile and action plan. This included preparing curriculum vitae, and developing interview preparation and jobsearch skills. Youthstart staff also facilitated access to other services such as health. Staff successfully ran a 'Life skills' programme to assist young people to



assess and identify their own needs, and to build capacity to address and cope with these needs. It also helped them to build a positive view of themselves and their future lives. The programme attracted 31 young people and resulted in positive outcomes, including sustained engagement with drug/ alcohol treatment services, improved attendance at training courses and success in taking up employment.

In each local authority visited, Careers Scotland and the Social Work Service had negotiated partnership agreements on services for young people leaving care as part of the throughcare

and aftercare arrangements. They also had contact with looked after children through Enhanced Resource Pilots in selected schools. However, there were examples of poor communication and disjointed planning, leading to gaps and delays. At the post-school stage, links between throughcare and aftercare providers and pathway plans coordinators were not always clear.

The inspection team did not make direct enquires into the forms of educational and care provision for young people after leaving care. However, some of those interviewed noted the positive impact on young people of not being forced to leave care at sixteen. In some local authorities, young people were enabled to remain in existing placements beyond their sixteenth birthday. Local authorities can provide support to young people on a discretionary basis up to the age of twenty-one. There were also good examples within local authorities of young people being supported to maintain tenancies. Such arrangements enhanced the quality of the transition process for young people over the age of sixteen.

In one authority, a voluntary organisation service assisted young people, including young parents, to obtain and sustain affordable tenancies and to participate in community activities. The Housing Support Team allocated key workers to help young people with making housing applications, maximising benefits, and acquiring current information and advice. Key workers linked with other agencies to provide advocacy support to the young people when necessary. They also worked with vulnerable young people to support them into education, training or employment. One young person interviewed commented on the positive relationship established with her key worker who had: supported her into a council house; helped her sort out her benefits; linked her up with a group of other young people; and was helping her build her self-esteem and confidence in the community.

Local authorities and their partners can maximise the support given to looked after children at points of transition by:

- > co-operating to make and share clear plans for extended transition for looked after school-aged children as part of a staged intervention process, starting as early as deemed necessary (e.g. P6 for primary transitions and S3 for secondary transitions);
- > ensuring that throughcare and aftercare arrangements are put in place and followed by staff in all partner agencies;
- > ensuring the effectiveness of the arrangements for post-school transition, including the provision of a pathways coordinator and the preparation of a pathways plan for each young person;
- > giving children approaching the age of sixteen the option of remaining in care placements longer;
- > ensuring that young people who drop out of learning are supported and that there is effective data sharing between schools, local authorities and Careers Scotland;
- > engaging parents, carers and residential staff in the planning and implementation of all transition arrangements and ensuring that key staff from their respective agencies attend and participate in all meetings about transition arrangements; and
- > rigorously tracking longer-term outcomes for looked after children.

3.8 HOME-SCHOOL LINKS

The importance of good home-school links in the educational development of all young people is widely recognised. The various forms and purposes of these links have also been made clear, as in the following extract, which illustrates high quality home-school link arrangements:

Our parents, including those with vulnerable children, play an important part in their children's learning and development. They participate well in relevant meetings and school events. They contribute as actively as possible to key aspects of their children's education and development, safety and health with effective support from initiatives developed by us and our partners. Parents, and groups representing parents, engage with us with confidence.

Parents, carers and families are satisfied with the quality of education we provide. Parents indicate that we give them clear reports and prompt and helpful responses to their views and enquiries about their child's attainment, development and

progress. Parents report that we support and encourage their involvement in discussions about education and their contribution to our school improvement. They are very satisfied with the opportunities they have to contribute to their children's learning and progress.

How good is our school? Level 5 illustration for the quality indicator: The school's success in involving parents carers and families.²⁰

'Home' for looked after children takes a variety of forms, and the setting up and maintenance of effective home-school links is a challenge for those who work with such children. At the same time, the support which good quality links between their school and their home can provide is critical to the holistic development of looked after children.

What we found

Education staff in local authorities visited were making good efforts to establish effective home-school links and involve parents, carers, and residential staff in supporting the education of looked after children.

²⁰ *How good is our school? (The Journey to Excellence: Part 3)*, HM Inspectorate of Education, 2007, ISBN 978 0 7053 1102 1.

The headteacher of one primary school had recognised the particular needs of grandparents with a caring role. She had successfully accessed sources of funding to meet the individual needs of some children looked after by their grandparents which resulted in improved attendance and behaviour. She had also accessed a project at a Child Guidance Clinic which had secured lottery funding to support grandparents who become main carers due to their own children's drug misuse. She gave a high priority to those children facing learning barriers, including those with learning disabilities.

In some of the authorities visited, foster carers had received training in supporting the education of young people. This had resulted in them feeling more confident in providing homework support. Several authorities ensured that all looked after children had individualised educational programmes (IEPs) or other personal learning plans and shared these with the children's parents or carers. In these cases, parents and foster carers commented positively on the support offered by schools to help pupils feel secure and to avoid exclusions for challenging behaviour.

In some authorities, specialist peripatetic teachers provided additional teaching and tutorial support. These teachers linked effectively with residential staff to plan educational programmes, support homework and make special arrangements for pupils to sit exams. These forms of intervention extended to providing educational support to children who had been excluded or who required to be educated at home for periods of time. In some authorities, these young people were supported to take part in extra-curricular activities and educational excursions. In less positive circumstances, however, some young people who were at home received only a few hours tutorial support per week.

In one authority, a small team of specialist teachers provided teaching and learning support to children and young people looked after in local residential care. Support included attending reviews and children's hearings, and working with children in their schools and residential care settings. These specialist teachers also helped children to obtain tuition from subject teachers. The team of specialist teachers worked effectively with residential care workers, including attending the residential care workers team meetings and regularly discussing children's needs and progress. The advantages of the specialist teachers working in both the education and care environment were evident, and the children and young people valued the range of support they provided.

Where effective communication had been established between home and school, staff reported increased participation of parents, carers and residential staff in parents' evenings and other school events. This also led to improved relationships and improved information-sharing with individual members of school staff.

A 'looked after children peripatetic team' with five teachers jointly funded by education and social work operated in one authority. One of these teachers worked specifically to support children at the early stages of being looked after at home. The team had trained all teachers designated for looked after children, using the Learning with Care materials. The service facilitated very positive links between schools and residential units where teachers were able to provide individual tuition to meet learning needs. There was an emphasis on minimising disruption to learning caused by exclusion or by changing schools. The same authority had established a team of home school link workers who worked in area teams allocated to particular schools. These teams focused on achievement, attainment and

promoting positive behaviour. The service had reduced the number of referrals to the local Scottish Children's Reporter and could intervene promptly when difficulties first arose. Two of the home link workers were allocated specifically to work with looked after children.

In another authority a pilot programme provided looked after children with additional learning support in school, residential homes and in their own homes. Through staff engaging positively with young people, their parents and carers and residential staff, close links were made that improved information-sharing and communication on issues impacting on the lives of the young people. Young people were being given consistent messages and assistance with learning, and were developing positive attitudes to education and future opportunities. Following a successful pilot, the authority had decided to mainstream this service.

In one local authority visited, there was a specialist scheme for foster carers to work with the most challenging young people.

The interventions made by staff of an independent fostering agency, illustrate how the lives of looked after children can be transformed for the better. This has involved the fostering agency working in partnership with the local authority (school, educational psychologist, transitions officer, social work, counsellor), further education, voluntary sector and NHS staff. This intervention has resulted in positive outcomes for many young people. One of the young people made the following comment:

'I found my fostering agency helpful because I have had support and it has helped me decide my future after leaving school and has helped me work out what steps I need to take for that future.'

Local authorities and their partners can improve home-school links for looked after children by:

SIGNPOSTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- > working together to ensure that strong links are made and clear communications take place among education, social work, health, other partners, parents, carers, residential staff in respect of each and every looked after child;
- > taking responsibility for ensuring that decisions made in respect of looked after children are acted upon and that the child's carers are kept informed of progress in implementing the actions;
- > providing training and support for parents, carers and residential staff to help them cope with challenging behaviour and support the educational attainment of the young people in their care;
- > targeting tutorial support to help looked after children learn in their own setting, wherever that may be;
- > supporting schools and parents/carers to ensure that attainment of children looked after at home does not lag behind that of children looked after away from home; and
- > helping looked after children, their families and carers to have high expectations about what they can achieve, helping them to realise them and celebrate success.

3.9 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

The report *Looked after children and young people: we can and must do better* noted:

'The need to raise awareness of the educational needs of looked after children and young people and improve the training of all foster carers, residential workers, lead professionals, support workers and associated professionals.'

The report also emphasised the importance of interdisciplinary training. Commenting on the disadvantages of separate discipline training, the report says that this:

'Mitigates against a shared understanding of the issues faced by these vulnerable young people, of the role of professionals and their responsibilities as corporate parents.'

Training materials produced as a result of the findings of *Learning With Care* include:

- > self-evaluation indicators;
- > a training pack for foster carers, residential workers, teachers and social workers;
- > a video containing views of looked after children and young people; and
- > an information booklet for foster carers, residential workers, teachers and social workers.

What we found

Local authorities were at different stages in providing training and development related to looked after children. Some local authorities had used the *Learning with Care* training materials, adapting these to take into account local circumstances. In best practice, local authorities were offering training in this area on a multi-agency basis.

In one local authority the Learning with Care materials have been adapted and were available electronically in six modules and were shared with agencies and service users. Information had been customised and updated with local information and statistics.

In almost all authorities visited, those interviewed confirmed the importance and positive impact of delivering training on a multi-agency rather than single agency basis. They recognised that this approach led to greater understanding of each others roles, more effective partnership working and more positive outcomes for young people. In good practice, teams of peripatetic LAC teachers provided inter-agency training to designated teachers who then delivered training within their schools. The appointment of LAC nurses and the significance of their role in providing training, advice and support was highlighted.

Key training themes identified as crucial to staff supporting looked after children included: attachment, developing resilience and self-esteem, and supporting young people with mental health issues. In some authorities, looked after children were included in primary nurture groups and staff received training to equip them to support nurture groups. Training in promoting positive behaviour, emotional literacy, solution-oriented approaches and restorative approaches was considered to be valuable for staff working with looked after children. In one local authority, training in restorative practices was available in children's homes for residential staff as well as for teachers in schools.

Training on attachment and resilience was offered to different services in one authority visited. This had led to positive feedback and the promotion of a shared language and understanding between professionals in different services. A trainer had led whole school training in a secondary school on an in-service day, involving educational psychologists and social workers.

In one local authority, the Psychological Service had developed a training pack designed to assist staff in schools to become more aware of the needs of looked after children. The pack was used in a variety of ways, including a quick reference guide. It included a range of themes, book reviews and links to relevant websites. The themes covered included: the child's background, abilities, ways of coping; early intervention in crisis situations; flexibility and creativity in developing management strategies; and encouraging regular communication with carers and social workers. Attachment and attachment disorders feature significantly in the pack, with a range of case study examples.

In some authorities, foster parents reported they had received good training to support their role, and effective foster care networks were in place. Some carers felt that the timing and location of training needed to be reviewed so that it was delivered when they needed it and in a location they could easily reach. Training for carers was delivered at local authority level and by independent and voluntary organisations.

Staff in several authorities highlighted the need to provide training for all staff in the local authority's corporate parenting role. Such training was not commonly available. Several authorities had run useful training for designated teachers. However, staff in some other authorities said they had not had training to prepare them to take on this role.

Training related to planning for looked after children, for example Individual Educational Programmes (IEPs), Coordinated Support Plans (CSPs) and Care Plans, tended to be limited to single agency delivery. A consequence of this was that staff in partner agencies were less likely to be aware of the content of these plans. For example, some education staff were aware of the educational section of Care Plans but not the other sections and not all social workers were aware of the significance of IEPs. A consequence of this approach to training was that opportunities were being missed to integrate planning mechanisms.

An information website (www.ltscotland.org.uk/lookedafterchildren) for professionals, foster carers, residential workers parents and looked after children and young people developed in partnerships with the looked after children education forum and Learning and Teaching Scotland was launched in May 2008. The website supports improved outcomes for all looked after children, young people and care leavers through the provision of information, useful resources and networking opportunities to those who support them and others who have an interest in this area, including children and young people as well as parents and carers.

SIGNPOSTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Local authorities and their partners can enhance the training and development for those working with looked after children by:

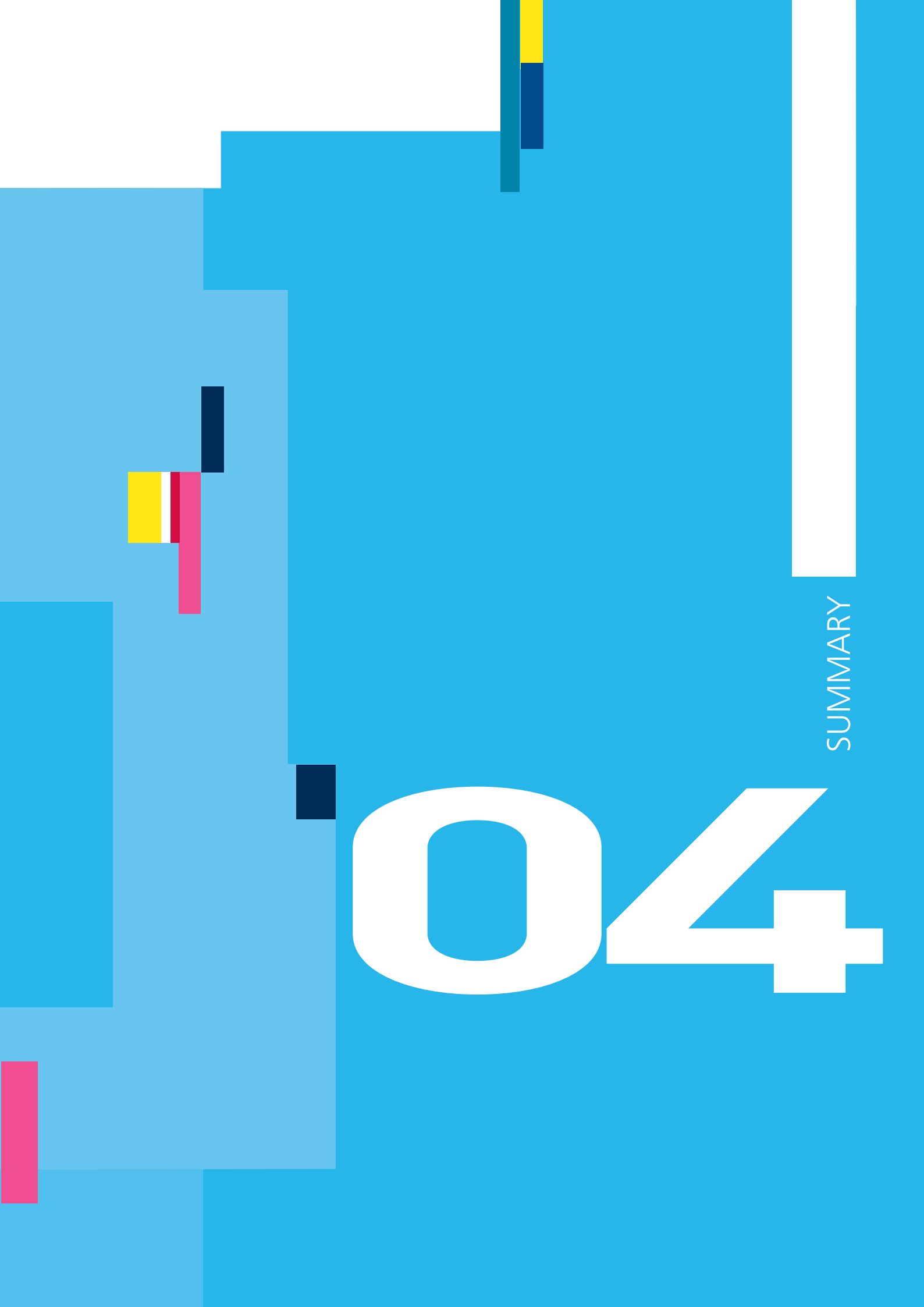
- > ensuring training and development opportunities are sufficiently diverse to cover the full range of needs of those working with, and caring for, looked after children;
- > providing training for all relevant staff on their corporate parenting role;
- > delivering relevant training programmes for all key partners on a multi-agency basis;
- > ensuring the needs of kinship carers, including grandparents, are not overlooked when providing training programmes; and
- > providing regular training opportunities for designated teachers on their roles and responsibilities, on information sharing and on partnership working.





04

SUMMARY



This report on the education of looked after children highlights a continually changing population of children and young people with a complex range of educational and care needs. It looks at how the Scottish Government, local authorities and their partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors were working together to assess and respond to these needs and to improve educational outcomes for looked after children. The report identifies what was working well and provides many examples of good practice. It also identifies a number of 'signposts for improvement' through which the quality of services and educational outcomes for looked after children can be improved. In the main, following these signposts involves building on existing good practice and making use of existing guidance.

What was working well

The following positive developments are illustrated by examples of good practice throughout Chapter 3 of the report:

- > There is statistical evidence that there have been some improvements in recent years in the levels of achievement, although the main benchmarks used for reporting nationally on the progress of looked after children are modest.²¹
 - > Chief Officers and elected members were taking an increased interest in the corporate parenting of looked after children, particularly in raising expectations regarding their educational attainment and achievement.
 - > Services were developing partnerships, with the intent of working together more effectively to provide better educational support to looked after children. Some authorities had engaged in very effective partnerships with voluntary organisations. Many voluntary organisations were making a positive contribution to improving
- outcomes for looked after children nationally. These developing partnerships were putting a greater focus on meeting the learning and care needs of looked after children, and were bringing benefits in the form of good practice and improved outcomes.
 - > Authorities had made good efforts to improve joint planning of education and care services for looked after children, and were involving a wide range of partners in planning to meet the needs of these children. The needs of looked after children, and how these should be met were beginning to be considered as a part of integrated children's services planning.
 - > Authorities were using the flexibility provided through *Curriculum for Excellence* to make curriculum arrangements to meet the sometimes complex learning needs of looked after children.
 - > There were positive developments in promoting participation and advocacy related to looked after children, so that they could play a more active part in decisions related to their learning and their future development and contribute to the development of services
 - > Support for transitions between primary and secondary schools for looked after children was generally well managed.
 - > Good progress was being made in broadening the concept of home-school links to embrace parents, a broad range of carers and residential staff.
 - > The authorities visited were at different stages in providing training and development related to looked after children. In the best practice, the wide range of training needs was being identified and met in a number of innovative ways.

²¹ Percentage of care leavers beyond minimum school leaving age with at least one qualification at SCQF level 3 or above; and percentage achieving both English and Mathematics at this level.

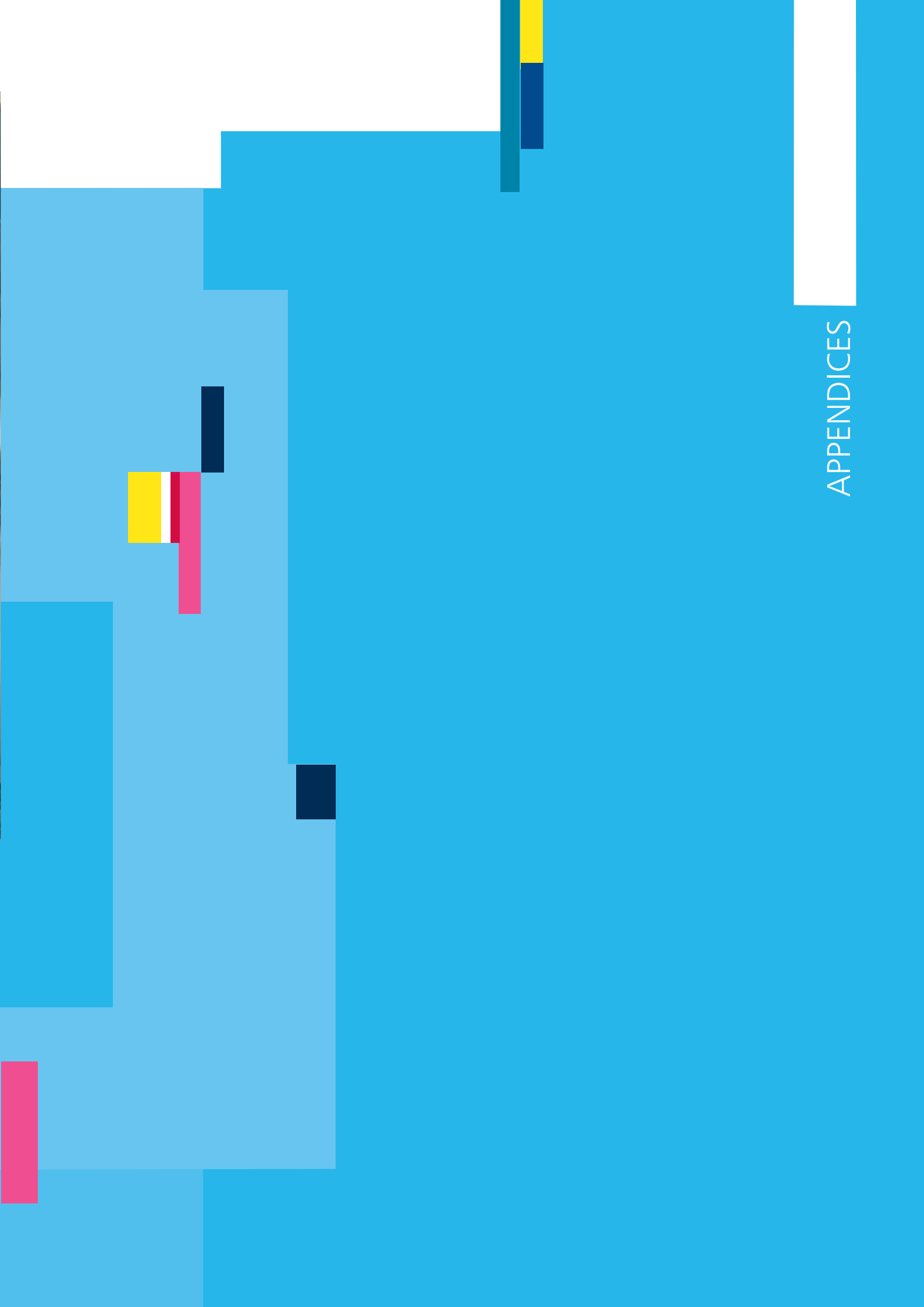
What needed to be improved

- > Although most elected members were committed to their corporate parenting role, some were unclear about the council's vision for the education of looked after children and of their responsibilities as corporate parents. Not all staff at the operational level were aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- > Children, young people and their parents and carers needed to be more involved in the planning and review of educational and care services for looked after children.
- > There was a need to improve the methods for assessing the holistic needs of looked after children, particularly in extending multi-disciplinary approaches to assessment of need, in line with the *GIRFEC* national programme.
- > Too many children were still being excluded from schools, and other children had limited access to the curriculum. There was considerable variability in the quality of the educational experience provided in off-site provision.
- > Advocacy support for all looked after children, particularly those looked after at home and those in kinship care placements, needed to be better understood and addressed.
- > Support for transition at times other than at the main transition points between phases of education was not always well planned, and the need for support was sometimes overlooked. There was considerable scope for improvement in transition support for young people who were leaving care beyond the school leaving age, including support for transition to further and higher education.
- > Despite the widespread recognition of the value of inter-agency training, this was not happening enough. There was still the need to make sure that all staff working with looked after children have sufficient and appropriate training for their respective levels of responsibility, including, where appropriate, responsibilities as corporate parents. Joint training needed to focus more on how the full range of services for children can be brought to bear on supporting the educational development of looked after children.





APPENDICES



APPENDIX 1: SIGNPOSTS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Corporate parenting

Local authorities and their partners can improve the quality and effectiveness of their corporate parenting role by:

- > working closely as community planning partners in a shared responsibility for looked after children;
- > providing training to ensure that all elected members and relevant staff are aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities;
- > improving monitoring, tracking and information sharing on looked after children so that they know who their looked after children are, where they are, and how well they are doing;
- > promoting positive attitudes and high expectations for looked after children and by recognising and celebrating their achievements;
- > establishing appropriate targets for the attainment of looked after children in Single Outcome Agreements;
- > providing support which nurtures children and young people and builds their resilience; and
- > providing appropriate financial and practical support for looked after children throughout their education and in their transition to adulthood.

Partnerships

Local authorities and their partners can improve the quality and effectiveness of partnership working to support looked after children by:

- > engaging with appropriate local agencies and organisations to establish effective partnerships and good communication systems that will assist in meeting the holistic needs of, and improving outcomes for, looked after children;
- > building improved links with voluntary sector organisations to provide a wide range of support services for looked after children;
- > ensuring that partners within the Local Community Planning Partnership are clear about their roles and responsibilities and have a shared understanding and agreement regarding the outcomes they want to achieve for looked after children;
- > building into joint planning arrangements, effective systems for evaluating the impact of partnership working; and
- > promoting active partnerships with children, young people and their parents and carers which involve them in planning and review of services.

Strategic planning and review

Local authorities and their partners can improve the quality and effectiveness of strategic planning and review related to services for looked after children by:

- > establishing a clear shared vision and priorities to improve outcomes for looked after children;
 - > ensuring that planning and review of services related to looked after children is embedded within wider arrangements for planning and review of services for children;
 - > ensuring rigorous and systematic approaches to the evaluation of services for looked after children; and
 - > creating structures for looked after children to have a voice and to influence planning and review.
-

Assessing and meeting needs

Local authorities and their partners can improve the effectiveness of the ways in which they assess and meet the needs of looked after children by:

- > ensuring that all relevant services are involved jointly in identifying and meeting the needs of the children;
- > ensuring that, wherever feasible, children are given a voice in helping to identify and meet their needs;
- > using strategic joint approaches to ensure that support methods are built on the best of practice and that the necessary resources are brought to bear on children's problems at the earliest possible stage;
- > having effective systems for sharing information across partner agencies about the needs of looked after children, the support being provided and the children's response to that support;
- > improving approaches to meeting the educational needs of excluded pupils; and
- > ensuring that the needs of looked after children placed with carers receive the same levels of support as those in residential placements.

Education placement and curriculum flexibility

Local authorities and their partners can improve the quality of educational experience of looked after children by:

- > striving to remove barriers to learning, with the aim of maintaining looked after children within mainstream school;
- > using the flexibility provided by Curriculum for Excellence to provide a more customised curriculum which is structured around meeting the needs of the individual child/young person;
- > recording young people's wider achievements, including Youth Achievement Awards, ASDAN, Duke of Edinburgh Award, on their management information systems and in pupil progress files;
- > ensuring that alternative educational placements provide educationally rich environments and provide a relevant curriculum through which young people can reach their full potential;
- > working together to assure the quality of the educational experience of looked after children, particularly where education is provided off-site;
- > minimising the disruption to education caused by exclusion from school, and providing ongoing education and support when short/medium term exclusion is necessary;
- > providing access to health checks and sex education programmes which looked after children may have missed due to changes in placements and schools; and
- > ensuring a planned approach to re-integrating looked after children back into mainstream provision.

Participation and advocacy

Local authorities and their partners can improve the participation of looked after children in decisions which affect their lives by:

- > drawing on the advice and support of agencies specialising in advocacy for children and young people;
- > providing services to ensure that there are formal and meaningful opportunities for all looked after children to be consulted about the range and quality of services being offered to them;
- > ensuring the different needs of looked after children in residential schools, in foster care and kinship care placements, and those being looked after at home are understood and reflected in appropriate arrangements for supporting their advocacy and encouraging their participation in decision-making; and
- > dealing with the particular obstacles to advocacy and communication which may face some looked after children with disabilities.

Transitions

Local authorities and their partners can maximise the support given to looked after children at points of transition by:

- > cooperating to make and share clear plans for extended transition for looked after school-aged children as part of a staged intervention process, starting as early as deemed necessary (e.g. P6 for primary transitions and S3 for secondary transitions);
 - > ensuring that throughcare and aftercare arrangements are put in place and followed by staff in all partner agencies;
 - > ensuring the effectiveness of the arrangements for post-school transition, including the provision of a pathways coordinator and the preparation of a pathways plan for each young person;
 - > giving children approaching the age of sixteen the option of remaining in care placements longer;
 - > ensuring that young people who drop out of learning are supported and that there is effective data sharing between schools, local authorities and Careers Scotland;
 - > engaging parents, carers and residential staff in the planning and implementation of all transition arrangements and ensuring that key staff from their respective agencies attend and participate in all meetings about transition arrangements; and
 - > rigorously tracking longer term outcomes for looked after children.
-

Home-school links

Local authorities and their partners can improve home-school links for looked after children by:

- > working together to ensure that strong links are made and clear communications take place among education, social work, health, other partners, parents, carers, residential staff in respect of each and every looked after child;
- > taking responsibility for ensuring that decisions made in respect of looked after children are acted upon and that the child's carers are kept informed of progress in implementing the actions;
- > providing training and support for parents, carers and residential staff to help them cope with challenging behaviour and support the educational attainment of the young people in their care;
- > targeting tutorial support to help looked after children learn in their own setting, wherever that may be;
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- > helping looked after children, their families and carers to have high expectations about what they can achieve, helping them to realise them and celebrate success.

Training and development

Local authorities and their partners can improve training and development for those working with looked after children by:

- > ensuring training and development opportunities are sufficiently diverse to cover the full range of needs of those working with, and caring for, looked after children;
- > providing training for all relevant staff on their corporate parenting role;
- > delivering relevant training programmes for all key partners on a multi-agency basis;
- > ensuring the needs of kinship carers, including grandparents, are not overlooked when providing training programmes; and
- > providing regular training opportunities for designated teachers on their roles and responsibilities, on information sharing and on partnership working.



APPENDIX 2: LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS VISITED INCLUDED:

- > Angus Council
- > City of Edinburgh Council
- > East Ayrshire
- > East Dunbartonshire
- > East Renfrewshire Council
- > Glasgow City Council
- > Highland Council
- > Inverclyde Council
- > North Ayrshire
- > Renfrewshire Council
- > South Ayrshire Council
- > South Lanarkshire Council
- > Stirling Council
- > West Dunbartonshire
- > West Lothian Council

Other organisations visited:

- > Aberlour Childcare Trust
- > Barnardo's Scotland
- > Careers Scotland
- > SWIIS Foster Care

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