Institute of Education

UCL

The education of children in care in North East England

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1   Executive summary

1.1   Introduction

This report presents findings from a multi-strategy study conducted by UCL Institute of Education, commissioned by and in collaboration with Virtual School Headteachers (VSH) from across the twelve local authorities (LA) in North East England and DAppEdPsy Educational Psychology students from Newcastle University. The overall aim of the project was to gain an insight into teaching and learning practice in schools in North East England at the pupil and whole school level to support the education of children in care. Previously reported research has often highlighted many of the shortcomings of provision in schools and how the education system collectively has not always met the education needs of children and young people in care. It was within this national and regional context that the North East England region of Virtual School Headteachers wanted to learn more about the effective teaching and learning of children and young people in care. Moreover, this study purposefully identified a group of children who had very positive experiences of education and were thriving in their settings, in order to learn more about what success looks like in schools to support the education of children and young people in care.

Over the spring and summer terms of 2018, data were collected from an e-survey of over 400 designated teachers (DT) across North East England, focus group meetings with DTs, face-to-face interviews with children and lesson observations. The research is one of the first large scale studies in England to investigate, in depth, teaching and learning practices in schools, for a group of children and young people who experience significant disadvantage.

1.2   The research questions

The analysis of the data was based on three research questions:

i   What does High Quality Teaching (HQT) in the classroom 'look like' for students in care?

ii   What additional provision, beyond HQT, is in place in schools to support better outcomes for students in care?

iii   What professional learning and development opportunities are taking place in schools to support the education of students in care?

1.3   Methodology

The study adopted a multi-strategy research design to investigate the three research questions from February to July 2018. Data were collected in four ways across the two terms:

i   An e-Survey to DTs (n=454) across all twelve LAs in North East England

ii   Face-to-face interviews with thirteen primary (n= 8) and secondary children (n= 5) from nine LAs

iii Ten lesson observations (P=4/S=4)

iv Two focus group meetings with DTs in two LAs.

The survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS and using thematic analysis for the qualitative data.

1.4   Key findings in brief

Designated Teacher characteristics

i   The majority (82%) of DTs who completed the e-survey were female.

ii Just over half of DTs (57%) had been in role for five or more years.

iii Over three quarters of DTs (85 %) were members of the school leadership team.

Key Finding 1: Characteristics of HQT for students in care

The thematic analysis of lesson observations and interview accounts from the children identified, across both data sets, three common characteristics of HQT: **quality of instruction; classroom climate and relationships** and **developing independence with learning.** In addition, the analysis from the lesson observations showed the importance of **engagement with learning** and the children spoke about the importance of **interaction with peers** for their learning.

Key Finding 2: Embedded and developing HQT approaches

DTs reported a **range of HQT approaches used by teachers** in the classroom. The 'top three' HQT approaches most embedded in practice were: **praise being specific and named, children in care not being treated differently** and **making learning expectations in the classroom explicit**. HQT practices reported as requiring most development were: **considering the implications of subject specific content and the background of children in care** (such as family trees in history)**; quiet zones in the classroom for learning** and **breaking up learning with kinaesthetic activities.**

Key Finding 3: Additional support in school for students in care

The most common form of additional support across all phases was **carer involvement** in supporting a child's education. Further common approaches were: **counselling; small group literacy support; behaviour interventions** and **input from Educational Psychologists (EP).** There was a marked increase of DTs reporting behaviour interventions in secondary phases (92%) compared to early years (63%) and primary phases (69%). Any form of additional literacy support did not come in the top five secondary DT responses.

Key Finding 4: Whole school practice to support HQT

Seventy percent of DTs reported that the education of children in care was specifically included in their **setting's improvement plan.** The majority of DTs (76%) reported that their settings had a **specific policy in place for children in care** and most DTs (87%) reported that **an individual pupil profile of strengths and targets for learning** was shared with the relevant colleagues in their settings.

Key Finding 5: Professional learning and development in schools to support the education of students in care

The majority of DTs (74%) reported some form of professional learning and development (PLD) activity concerned with the education of children in care in the past two years in their setting. Over three quarters of DTs reported that PLD activities were related in some way to the to the **social, emotional and/or mental health and wellbeing** of children (86%), with training on attachment making up 58% of PLD overall. **Whole school training** was the most common form of PLD approach, with working groups the least reported approach. A third of DTs (34%) **reported that learning from a PLD activity was regularly implemented in their setting** and **over half of DTs (58%) reported that there was some implementation of learning** from PLD activities but that it was **not consistent** across the setting.

Key Finding 6: Professional learning and development of Designated Teachers

Designated Teachers (n=342) turned to **Virtual Schools as the first source of support** for carrying out their roles and for their own PLD, followed by outside professionals (n=286) and government websites (n=221). They identified the need to know more about **funding** (n=231), **greater knowledge and understanding of research evidence** to support the education of children in care (n=195) and how to **influence change** in their settings as the most important priorities for their own professional learning and development (n=145).

1.5   Key recommendations from the research

Children and young people in care respond to HQT that is challenging, promotes peer learning, uses approaches effective for all learners but at the same time is sensitive to the implications of being in care. Two key findings stood out from the accounts of the children and young people. The first was how academic challenge was welcomed and enjoyed by many of the children and the second was the reported importance of peers to learning in the classroom. Collaborative learning is widely recognised as a pedagogical practice that is beneficial for learners both academically and socially.[1] What is less known is if this practice is in any way qualitatively different for children in care compared with their peers and would benefit from further investigation.

The education of children and young people in care with a Special Educational Need (SEN) and/or disability requires greater focus in the classroom. HQT approaches that took into account children who experienced cognitive, learning, developmental and/or social and emotional barriers to learning were not commonly 'embedded' in classroom practice. This is significant given that, as of 2017, 56.3% of children in care had SEN and/or a disability.[2]

1 Education Endowment Foundation (2018). Teaching and Learning Toolkit. Retrieved from https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/pdf/generate/?u=https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/pdf/toolkit/?id=152&t=Teaching%20and%20Learning%20Toolkit&e=152&s=
2 Department for Education (2018). Children Looked After in England including adoption 2017 to 2018.Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/757922/Children_looked_after_in_England_2018_Text_revised.pdf

Additional support in school for children and young people in care should ensure that all barriers to learning, in addition to any Social, Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH) needs, are addressed. There was a discernible increase in 'behaviour' interventions between the primary and secondary phases and a reduction in the levels of additional literacy support at secondary level. Although SEMH is the most common type of primary SEN for children in care, covering 37.6% of those with a statement or EHC plan and 45.6% of those with SEN support, this means that the majority of children in care have another type of primary need and are at risk of not being able to fully access the curriculum.

PLD activities in schools should reflect the range of barriers to learning experienced by children and young people in care. It was encouraging to find a high number of settings had taken part in some form of PLD activity related to the needs of children in care in the previous two years. This is evidence of the work of DTs and VS in ensuring that education of children in care is prioritised, in terms of PLD in schools. However, the finding that 86% of all PLD focused on some aspect of SEMH, including 58% on attachment, indicates that not all barriers to learning are receiving sufficient attention in schools.

Designated Teachers require support from SLT and VS in using evidence informed approaches to implementing and embedding change as a result of PLD in their settings to maximise the impact on student learning. Just 34% of DTs reported that learning from PLD associated with children in care was consistently implemented in their settings. One possible explanation is the use of whole school trainings events/days, which, if used in isolation, have been shown to have limited impact on changing practice in the classroom.

2   Introduction

2.1   Background

Despite policy attention, the educational attainment, in terms of national qualifications, of children in care at sixteen has not substantially changed in recent years. In 2017, the average Attainment 8 score for children in care is 19.3 compared to 44.5 for those not in care, although this gap is reduced when the effects of the proportion of children with special education needs (SEN) and/or a disability are removed.[3] For all children included in the progress measure calculations (state-funded schools, non-maintained special schools and alternative provision), children in care made less progress than their peers not in care. As well as national data, evidence from research studies has shown that certain characteristics of being a child or young person in care are more closely associated with the risk of underachieving in school.[4] These are, principally, being male, some specific learning difficulties, having a disability and length of time in placement. The lack of marked progress in educational attainment and progress, despite policy interventions, highlights the challenges in addressing the complexity of the problem.

Previously reported research, including studies that include the perspectives of children and young people, has highlighted many shortcomings of provision in schools and how the education system collectively has not always met the education needs of children and young people in care. It was within this national and regional context that the North East England region of Virtual School Headteachers (VSH) wanted to know more about the teaching and learning of children and young people in care at both the primary and secondary phases. Moreover, this study purposefully identified a group of children who had very positive experiences of education and were thriving in their settings, in order to learn more about what success looks like in schools to support the education of children and young people in care.

The VSH wanted to hear the views of children and young people about what makes 'good' teaching and to elicit from practitioners their perspectives on high quality teaching (HQT) in the classroom and additional support in school that has supported better outcomes for children and young people in care.

It was envisaged that the findings would facilitate a deeper understanding of the wider school contextual factors for teaching and learning strategies employed by practitioners and any barriers to learning that exist for children in care in school. The project originated in October 2016, when the VSH from the North East England region came together with researchers from UCL Institute of Education for two days, as part of the Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) knowledge exchange programme, to identify the research and practice priorities for the region.

3 Department for Education (2018). Children Looked After in England including adoption 2017 to 2018.
Retrieved from https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/757922/Children_looked_after_in_England_2018_Text_re-vised.pdf
4 J. Sebba, D. Berridge, N. Luke, J. Fletcher, K. Bell, S. Strand and A. O'Higgins (2015). The educational progress of looked after children in England: Linking care and educational data.
Retrieved from http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/EducationalProgressLookedAfterChildrenOverviewReport_Nov2015.pdf

2.2   The study

This report presents the findings from a multi-strategy study conducted by UCL Institute of Education, commissioned by and in collaboration with the VSH from North East England. The study was undertaken to improve our knowledge and understanding of teaching practices concerned with the education of children in care from the perspective of practitioners and the children and young people. Over the spring and summer terms of 2018, data were collected from: an e-survey of over 400 designated teachers (DTs) across North East England; focus group meetings with DTs in two LAs in North East England; face-to-face interviews with thirteen children and lessons observed for ten of these children.

3   The research questions

The overall aim of the project was to improve our knowledge and understanding of teaching practices in school that support the education of children and young people in care.

Specifically, the study sought to generate new evidence about HQT and additional support for children in care and how school leaders and practitioners might adapt, refine or change their approaches to teaching and learning for this group of children and young people.

The research questions were:

i   What does HQT in the classroom 'look like' for children in care?

ii   What additional provision, beyond HQT, is in place in schools to support better outcomes for children in care?

iii   What professional learning and development opportunities are taking place in schools to support the education of children in care?

4 Methodology

4.1 Research design

The study adopted a multi-strategy research design to investigate the three research questions from February to July 2018. Data were collected in four ways across the two terms:

i An e-Survey to DTs (n=454) across all twelve local authorities in North East England Face-to-face interviews with primary (n= 8) and secondary students (n= 5) from nine LAs

ii Ten lesson observations (P=4/S=4)

iii Two focus group meetings with DTs in two LAs.

Over 80% of the respondents were female (82%) and almost half of the DTs (46%) had been in role for five or more years (Figure 2). The highest percentage of DTs in role for five or more years was in early years settings (57%), which was 22 percentage points higher than DTs in secondary schools (35%) (Figure 3).

The majority of DTs (85%) were members of the senior leadership team and held a variety of (one or more) other roles and responsibilities including Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) (n=249), SENCO (n=152) and Headteacher (n=135) (Figure 4).

4.2 Participants

The research included two groups of participants who were recruited, by each VS, from the twelve LAs across the region:

i 13 children in care (8 primary and 5 secondary children) from nine of the twelve LAs

ii DTs across twelve LAs in North East England.

A total of 456 DTs out of a possible 958 from across the region took part in the survey which was a response rate of 48% overall.[5] There was variation in survey responses between 100% completion in one LA to the lowest response rate of 13 % (Figure 1). The majority of responses (66%) were from DTs in primary settings which reflects the greater number of primary schools in each region. Twenty two per cent of the responses were from DTs in secondary settings.

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5 388 participants completed the entire survey.
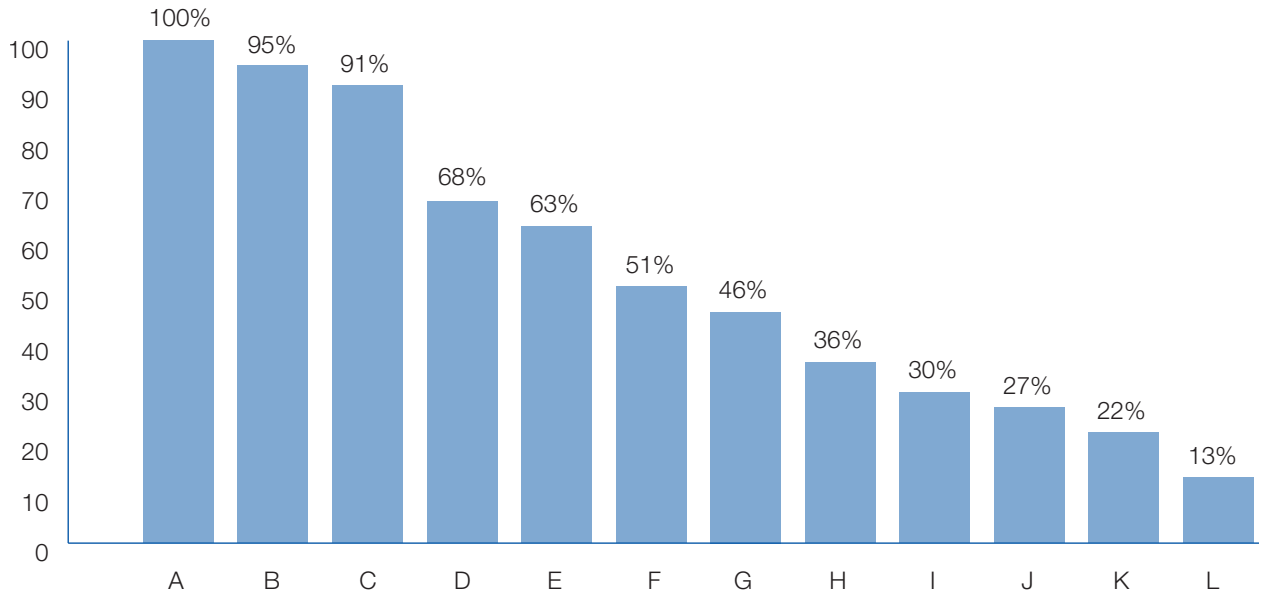
Figure 1: DT survey response rate within each of the twelve local authorities (%)

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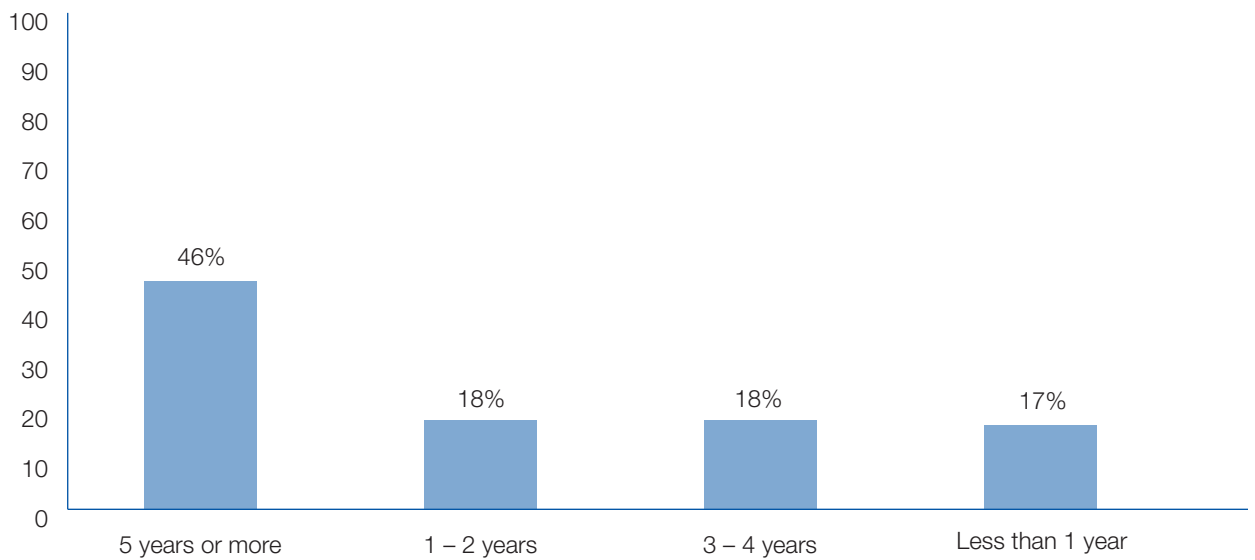
Figure 2: Number of years in DT role (%)
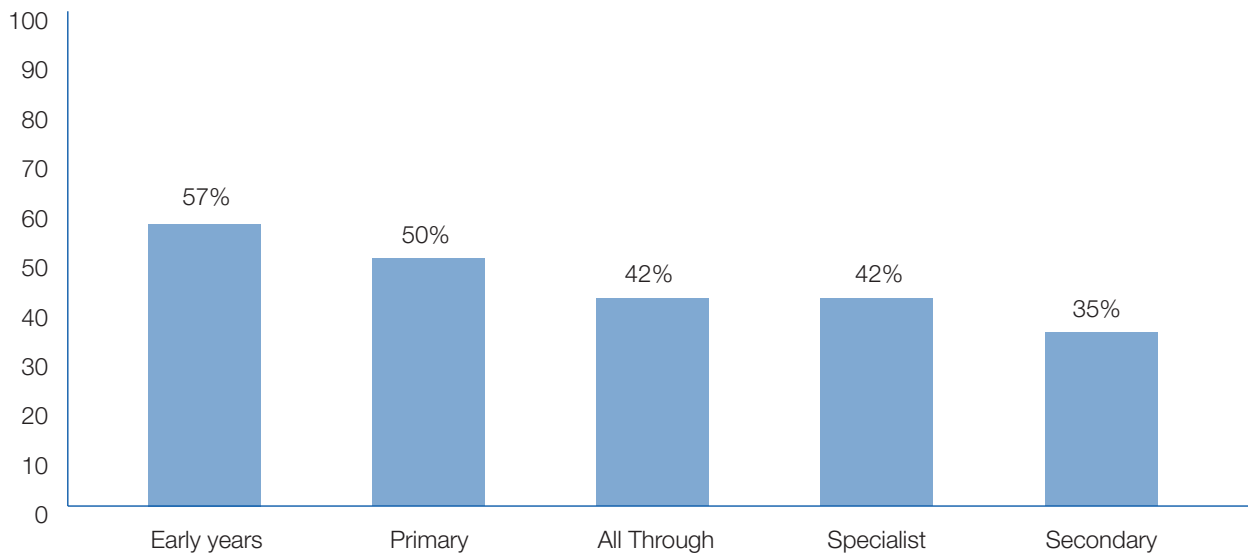
Figure 3: DTs in role for five or more years by phase (%)

The majority of DTs (85%) were members of the senior leadership team and held a variety of (one or more) other roles and responsibilities including Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) (n=249), Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) (n=152) and Headteacher (n=135) (Figure 4).
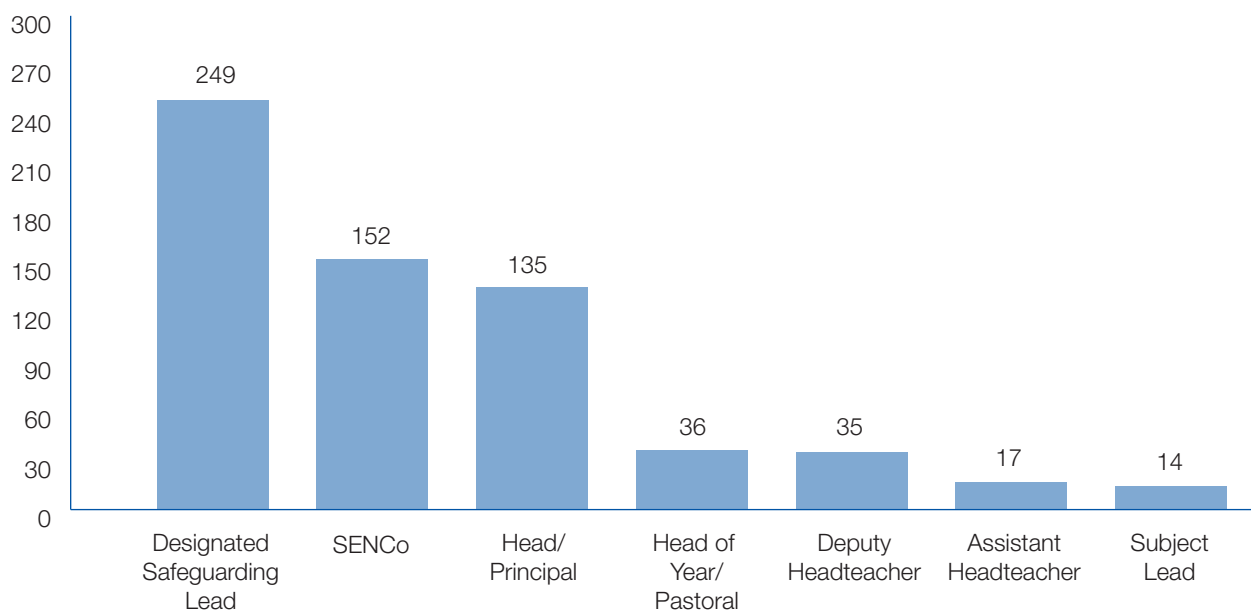
Figure 4: Roles held in addition to DT role (N)

4.3   Data collection

Designated Teacher survey

An online survey was sent by the VS to all DTs in the twelve LAs to gather a comprehensive account of the specific approaches/strategies used in their schools to support the education of children in care, the guidance DTs give on classroom teaching strategies and additional support provided. The survey also asked DTs to make judgements about the impact of different approaches/strategies used in their schools. Finally, DTs were asked about any PLD activities related to children in care in their settings in the previous two years.

Lesson observations

The children who participated in the study were asked to identify a lesson that they enjoyed, where they made progress in their learning and that they (and the teacher identified) were happy to have observed. The purpose of the observation was to provide an independent perspective on the learning and teaching context. The lessons were observed by TEPs on the DAppEdPsy programme at Newcastle University and a member of the research team who is an Applied Educational Psychologist. An observation framework was created for the observations based on the wider literature concerned with the characteristics of high quality teaching. A training session was held with the students by members of the research team to review and prepare for the observations.

Interviews with students

The children were interviewed to gain their perspective on positive teaching and learning experiences and what more could be undertaken in schools to support their learning. The interviews were conducted by TEPs on the DAppEdPsy programme at Newcastle University and two members of the research team.

DT focus groups

Two focus group meetings were held with DTs from two of the LAs towards the end of the project. The purpose of the groups was to validate and review some of the initial findings from the survey, student interviews and the lesson observations.

4.4   Data analysis

Data from the e-survey was collected by UCL software and converted to SPSS to streamline data analysis and analysed using descriptive statistics. The lesson observation data and interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis.[6]

4.5   Ethics

The study was subject to the University Research Ethics Committee's oversight which included stringent protocols due to the complexity of getting consent for working with children in care. This included gaining a 'chain of consent' for each child involved from the VSH, social worker, foster carer, headteacher, teacher and finally the student. The research did not proceed if consent was not received at any point from any person in the chain. The final report did not attribute data to any specific local authority of the twelve involved in order to anonymise local authorities and their staff, schools, teachers and children.

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6 Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative research*, 1(3), 385-405.

5   Findings

The findings are presented in response to the three research questions. Each question is presented separately. Findings are drawn from across the different data collection methods.

5.1   Research Question 1: What does HQT in the classroom 'look like' for students in care?

5.1.1 HQT: findings from DT survey

Whole school strategic importance of education of students in care

Evidence from practice and research clearly shows that learning and teaching in the classroom is underpinned by whole school structures and processes. As part of the e-Survey DTs were asked how their schools strategically demonstrated the importance placed on the education of students in care. The majority (76%) of DTs reported that their schools had a specific policy in place for students in care. Table 1 shows that secondary schools (84%) were more likely to have a specific policy in place and specialist schools (58%) least likely to have a policy.

Table 1: Student in care school policy in place (% by phase)

Phase	%
Secondary	84
All Through	79
Early Years	76
Primary	74
Specialist	58

Seventy percent of DTs reported that students in care were included in the school improvement plan. Secondary schools (84%) were more likely to include students in care in their school improvement plan and all through schools (62%) least likely (Table 2).

Table 2: Education of students in care in school improvement plan (% by phase)

Phase	%
Secondary	84
Specialist	72
Early Years	69
Primary	67
All through	62

Overall, 87% of DTs reported that individual profiles of strengths and targets were shared with relevant staff in their settings. All through schools (93%) were more likely to share individual profiles and secondary schools (79%) least likely (Table 3).

Table 3: Individual student profile of strengths and targets shared with relevant staff (% by phase)

Phase	%
All through	93
Specialist	92
Primary	89
Early Years	83
Secondary	79

Designated Teachers were presented with a list of HQT approaches drawn from evidence and asked to identify whether each practice was either embedded or developing in their settings. Table 4 summarises these findings and shows that the 'top three' HQT approaches most embedded in practice were; praise being specific and named, children in care not being explicitly treated differently and making expectations explicit.

Table 4: HQT approaches in the classroom (%)

High Quality Teaching Practice	Embedded	Developing	Don't know	Total (N)
Praise is specific and named	94%	5%	1%	323
Pupil in care not explicitly treated differently	94%	4%	2%	322
Make expectations for behaviour explicit by giving clear targets, explanations and modelling	91%	8%	1%	321
Listen to the pupil in care, giving them an opportunity to explain their behaviours	89%	10%	2%	320
Pupils are clear what is expected/what a good example of work looks like	87%	13%	1%	319
Range of groupings within the class including some random pairing activities	85%	12%	2%	321
Communicate positive achievements no matter how small	84%	15%	1%	318
Teaching Assistants are planned for and used to maximise learning	84%	16%	1%	320
Take time to find pupil strengths and ensure that the pupil has opportunities to demonstrate their skills	82%	17%	1%	319
Consideration given to lesson content and possible implications for pupils in care e.g. writing about my family	80%	18%	2%	319
Allow pupil to have a safe place to store belongings and any equipment	72%	22%	6%	318
Instructions given in small chunks with visual cues	72%	26%	2%	318
Provide visual timetables and task lists	70%	28%	3%	318
Chunk instructions and support with visual cues	69%	28%	3%	315
Personalise teaching where possible to reflect a pupil in care's interests	69%	28%	3%	316
Activities and listening broken up with breaks for more kinaesthetic activities	66%	31%	3%	317
Have a range of simple, accessible activities/equipment that the pupil enjoys using as calming exercises	63%	33%	4%	315
Views of pupils about their learning are regularly captured, no matter how small, in the classroom	63%	34%	3%	316
Where appropriate use a visual timer to measure and extend time on task	58%	36%	7%	317
Where possible, create a quiet area both for working and as a 'quiet time' zone	57%	36%	7%	312
Pupil in care has a classroom responsibility to raise self-esteem	56%	36%	8%	314
Use restorative justice approaches	55%	34%	11%	318
Give a set time for written work and do not extend into playtime to 'catch up'	53%	41%	6%	318
Memory supported by explicit demonstration and modelling of memory techniques	34%	56%	10%	30

A more detailed comparison of reported *embedded* HQT practices across primary and secondary phases showed consistency in practice with praise is specific and named and pupil in care not explicitly treated differently reported as the most common approaches (Table 5).

Table 5: Embedded HQT approaches embedded in the classroom by phase (%)

Primary	%	Secondary	%
Praise is specific and named	94	Pupil in care not explicitly treated differently	91
Pupil in care not explicitly treated differently	94	Praise is specific and named	82
Make expectations for behaviour explicit by giving clear targets, explanations and modelling	91	Listen to the pupil in care, giving them an opportunity to explain their behaviours	81
Listen to the pupil in care, giving them an opportunity to explain their behaviours	89	Clear lesson structure with learning objectives presented orally and visually	81
Pupils are clear what is expected and what a good example of work looks like	86	Make expectations for behaviour explicit by giving clear targets, explanations and modelling	78
Range of groupings within the class including some random pairing activities	85	Pupils are clear what is expected and what a good example of work looks like	74
Communicate positive achievements, no matter how small, and encourage home to do the same	84	Understanding checked by asking pupils to explain what they have to do	73
Teaching Assistants are planned for and used to maximise learning	84	Instructions given in small chunks with visual cues	71
Take time to find pupils' strengths and ensure that the pupil has opportunities to demonstrate their skills	82	Range of groupings within the class including some random pairing activities	70
Consideration given to lesson content and any possible implications for pupils in care e.g. writing about my family	80	Take time to find pupils' strengths and ensure that the pupil has opportunities to demonstrate their skills	70

The analysis of HQT approaches that DTs reported as *developing* in their settings also showed some, if not as many, consistencies in responses (Table 6). Three practices in particular that are not yet common across primary and secondary settings include; considering the implications of subject content (such as family trees in history) for students in care, quiet zones in the classroom for learning and breaking up learning with kinaesthetic activities.

Table 6: Developing HQT approaches in the classroom by phase (%)

Primary	%	Secondary	%
Memory supported by explicit demonstration and modelling of memory techniques	56	Teach pupils how to use post -it notes for questions and ideas rather than interruptions (when appropriate)	53
Give a set time for written work and do not extend into playtime to catch up	41	Memory supported by explicit demonstration and modelling of memory techniques	49
Pupil in care has a classroom responsibility to raise self -esteem	36	Where appropriate use a timer to measure and extend time on task	44
Where possible, create a quiet area both for working and as a quiet time zone	36	Have a range of simple, accessible activities/ equipment that the pupil enjoys to use as calming exercises	40
Where appropriate use a visual timer to measure and extend time on task	36	Give a set time for written work and do not extend into breaktime to catch up	39
Use restorative justice approaches	34	Activities and listening broken up with breaks for more kinaesthetic activities	38
Consideration given to lesson content and any possible implications for pupils in care e.g. drawing family trees	33	Personalise teaching where possible to reflect pupil in care's interests	36
Have a range of simple, accessible activities/equipment that the pupil enjoys to use as calming exercises	33	Where possible, create a quiet area both for working and as a quiet time zone	35
Activities and listening broken up with breaks for more kinaesthetic activities	31	The views of pupils about their learning are regularly captured, no matter how small, in the classroom	34
Chunk instructions and support with visual cues	28	Consideration given to lesson content and any possible implications for pupils in care e.g. drawing family trees	32

5.1.2 HQT: student perspectives and findings from lessons observations

Both primary and secondary students interviewed were able to thoughtfully articulate their reasons for choosing which lesson they wished be observed. They were confident in being able to express, from their perspectives, the characteristics of a 'good' lesson. The analyses of the ten observation lessons and the student interviews elicited five themes concerned with high quality teaching. The three themes that were common across both sets of data were; quality of instruction, classroom climate and relationships and developing independence with learning. The students also emphasised the importance of interaction with peers for their learning. Finally, during the lesson observations, engagement with learning was identified as a fifth theme.

Theme 1: Quality of Instruction

A strong characteristic of HQT observed across all of the lessons was the quality of instruction on the part of the teacher. This was exemplified from the beginning of lessons through the clear expectations of learning outcomes. Teachers in these lessons were able to sensitively scaffold learning by, for example, clear explanation of subject content and concepts, modelling learning and through thoughtful questioning at a class and individual student level. Teachers made links with 'real life' and 'every day' examples

to support conceptual understanding. Sensitivity to the individual needs of students was demonstrated by teachers through careful listening, checking understanding and individual feedback. A feature of the observed lessons was a strong sense of students being 'heard' through dialogue with practitioners and their peers.

The quality of instruction, or, in the words of the students 'what the teacher does' was an important theme throughout the accounts from both primary and secondary participants. For over half the students 'being able to explain things clearly' was a key attribute of good teachers. They showed how 'to do a problem' but in doing so offered advice or 'hints' towards an answer rather than giving the answer. As observed in lessons, students welcomed and found it interesting as well as helpful when teachers linked learning to 'real life' contexts. Students appreciated the use of various resources to support learning including interactive whiteboards, iPads, videos and audio materials. One key stage 4 student spoke of the usefulness of keeping vocabulary lists for subject content at the back of exercise books. They recounted learning activities that involved active participation such as debates and simple approaches such as moving from table to table to add thoughts to paper when investigating complex problems. Conversely, participants were clear about the type of instruction that was not effective including 'too many things on the board', over reliance on worksheets and too much teacher talk. Finally, students perceived effective teachers as always being willing and open to being asked questions or providing help when needed in lessons. They recognised the importance of this quality not just in terms of themselves as students in care but also for all students.

I appreciate when they give hints but don't give the answers to the students.
Primary Student

I had my art teacher; he was amazing. Then I had my science teacher who literally … he made science interesting for me. I had him from Year 9 through to Year 11 and he was just a really good teacher. He was the teacher that you could go to about anything and not be embarrassed about it. He would give off advice to us if we were tired or anything, like drink more whatever we need to drink, have more iron in your blood and all that. And he based the stuff we were learning about on real life topics, and that's always amazing to do.
Secondary Student

Theme 2: Classroom climate and relationships

A second common element of HQT observed was the climate created by the teacher which, amongst many factors, helped to engender positive and productive relationships in the lesson. There existed a high rate of student and teacher interactions which fostered a strong rapport in relationships. These positive relationships stemmed, in part, from the encouragement and reassurance provided to students. In some lessons, there existed a sense of playfulness on the part of the teacher which fostered a fun attitude to learning on behalf of the students. Moreover, this attitude existed alongside calm and purposeful learning environments. Teachers demonstrated and students responded to high and above-high expectations of learning which were underpinned by clear classroom routines.

It was clear from the interview analysis that these students in care welcomed academic challenge and being stretched. In fact, some described a 'bad' lesson as one where the tasks were too easy and/or insufficient. They appreciated learning environments where the teacher 'had control' and where students were not allowed to talk too much off task

or disrupt the learning of others. It was important to them that teachers were 'calm', 'easy to talk to' and 'did not shout'. One key stage 4 child spoke of the importance of being treated the same as other students and not being singled out. At the same time, however, they valued teachers who 'got to know them', although they saw this as important for all peers in the class.

> *Say I'm finding one thing easy, I like being stretched to a difficult thing.*
> *But when I'm finding it difficult then I'm getting stretched even further.*
> Secondary Student

> *I like to see a challenging piece of art that we have to do; I like that.*
> Primary Student

> *Having a teacher who respects and listens to what you think and what would help you in lessons. Just having … homework does help and revision lessons. Just really how the teacher is towards the pupils … it does help when you have a nice teacher.*
> Secondary Student

> *She lets you do … so for example, if I told her that something bad happened, she would say, do you want to go and read a book, do you want to go in the cosy corner, do you want to talk about it? She's always … she can always spare time for you no matter what.*
> Primary Student

Theme 3: Developing independence with learning

The third common characteristic of HQT both observed in the lessons and discussed by the students was the way in which students were encouraged to become independent learners. This was achieved, for example, through 'access and availability' of resources such as whiteboards, iPads, calculators, maps and classroom displays. Other strategies to foster independent learning were evident from the students' awareness of classroom routines such as the 'three before me' approach where a student must seek three other sources of support before asking a teacher for help. Students were encouraged to problem solve and often in the context of the teacher and students co-constructing learning to investigate more challenging subject content and conceptual understanding.

Although more evident in *how* the young people spoke about school life, rather than explicitly in their words, it was possible to identify that despite valuing and recognising the impact of relationships with peers and teachers for learning, they also enjoyed and were able to undertake independent learning. The students spoke of the importance of 'having goals' and 'working hard'. In the classroom they used strategies such as 'see three before me' and 'Point, Explain. Example, Link' (PEEL). All of the participants spoke positively about homework both in terms of being able to meet the academic demands and in keeping up to date. They also felt able to ask teachers for help if needed and the key stage 4 students reported accessing revision support offered to all students.

> *I was typing it up on my iPad because I'm a digital leader, which is … we've got a lot of IT, as you could see, and me and all the digital leaders are IT support. So we help everybody who needs help on the technology if they don't know how to do something.*
> Primary Student

> *Dictionary tasks are awesome.*
> Primary Student

They help you by, when they come over, sometimes they give you a hint of what you're supposed to be doing and then you're trying to grasp it up by then; and sometimes I think Ms XXXX does ''see three before me', so you'd have to see three students or try and figure it out yourself before 'you ask her.
Primary Student

Theme 4: Engagement with learning

In all lessons observed, students were highly involved and engaged with learning. The pace of lessons was appropriate to the subject content and to the differing needs of students. Sensitive differentiation on the part of the teacher further supported engagement with learning. Students were quickly assigned learning activities and engagement with these activities was sustained throughout the lesson. Pupils in learning dialogues with their peers was a common feature in all of the lessons observed.

I like my RE teacher because she mainly lets us work in groups. And she does fun lessons but they're also very educational; they help. So we either make revision posters or watch videos. So we learn about Muslim and Christian funerals and how the religion and stuff affects different rites. So we had to watch a video of a Christian rite and write down notes, then a Muslim rite, and then compare the differences and that really helped.
Secondary Student

Theme 5: Interaction with peers

One theme of HQT that was more evident in the interviews than the lesson observations was the importance placed by the students on interaction and dialogue with their peers in lessons. In class this meant; working in groups, being able to address problem solving with peers and asking peers for help with learning was mentioned by almost all of the children and young people interviewed. Learning in groups was not only important from a pedagogic perspective in terms of co-creating learning but it seemed to provide students with a sense of security in the lesson as well as making it more enjoyable.

I couldn't do without my friends there to support us and if I was in a classroom by myself then I wouldn't be able to concentrate, because I wouldn't have that friend next to us to just say, I can chat to someone if I need to.
Primary Student

I feel like I work better with other people.
Secondary Student

5.1.3 HQT and whole school provision: findings from DT focus groups

A common element of both DT focus groups was the subject of whole school approaches. In one group, of mixed primary and secondary school DTs, there was a consensus of opinion that the education of students in care was very much on the radar of senior leaders in schools. This was due to the high priority placed on pupils who experience 'disadvantage' in all forms, the reporting demands of Pupil Premium, attendance and progress data and an importance placed on inclusive schooling. In both groups, many DTs reported the existence of weekly conferences that helped to ensure that students who were experiencing significant difficulties were discussed and next steps agreed. Generally, it was agreed that the context of primary schools (one teacher per class) helped to ensure that PEP targets were more embedded into everyday learning in the classroom. To support this even more, one school had linked electronic personal education plans

(ePEP) targets, to the individual education plans (IEP) class targets which were a part of the appraisal process. Finally, one DT spoke of the benefits of having a DT also holding the SENCo role and thus having the knowledge and resources to make any referrals for SEN and/or disabilities more quickly.

5.2   Research Question 2: What additional provision, beyond HQT, is in place in schools to support better outcomes for students in care?

5.2.1 Additional provision: findings from DT survey

The most common forms of additional support across the different phases of education were: carer involvement; counselling; small group literacy support; behaviour interventions and input from Educational Psychologists (Table 7). The analysis at phase level showed three marked differences. Firstly, unlike all the other phases, DTs in secondary schools did not report small group literacy tuition in their 'top five' of additional support. Secondly, the reported use of behaviour interventions is relatively similar in the early years (63%) and primary phases (69%) but increases to 92% reported by DTs in secondary schools. Thirdly, another way in which additional support differed in the secondary phase was in the increased use of mentoring (88%) compared with all the other phases which was 50% or below.

Table 7: Additional provision for students in care by phase (%)

| Additional Support	Early Years	Primary	Secondary	All Through	Specialist
Carer involvement	80	78	88	82	68
Counselling/Therapy	74	74	86	89	68
Small group literacy tuition	71	78	74	64	68
Behaviour intervention	63	69	92	79	90
Educational Psychologist	80	74	71	68	65
Small group tuition for numeracy	69	73	68	61	61
After school club	63	68	76	71	45
School trip	63	63	75	71	58
Social skills groups	51	64	63	86	68
Nurture group	49	53	60	71	48
Attendance support	51	47	73	64	55
Equipment	46	48	65	54	52
Sports activity	46	49	62	46	42
Mentoring	43	37	88	50	42
One to one literacy tuition	46	41	58	50	48
One to one numeracy tuition	37	36	55	39	45
Books	46	39	49	21	19
Small group tuition for speech, language and communication needs	51	38	29	25	42
ICT hardware	31	28	54	25	48
ICT software	31	32	36	21	48
Revision support	20	21	74	21	19
Play therapy	37	36	12	54	42
Lego® therapy	37	32	24	36	45
Online learning	29	26	45	25	39
One to one non-core subject tuition	14	10	21	11	6
Summer school	9	7	18	11	13
Magazine subscription	3	4	4	0	3
Sunshine Circles®	0	1	0	0	0

5.2.2 Additional support: student perspectives

Due to the range of responses provided it was not possible to identify any underlying themes from the students' accounts. However, even though the students interviewed has been identified by adults and indeed saw themselves as succeeding in school, they were able to describe at least one form of additional support they were currently accessing or had accessed in the past. Additional support took the form of extra English and Maths groups, counselling, the use of an 'exit card' when needed, access to a support centre in school and having been in a nurture group for part of a week in primary school. Key stage 4 students, in particular, appreciated additional support that was offered as a package to all students such as mentoring, revision sessions and the school Virtual Learning platform.

5.3   Research Question 3: What professional learning and development opportunities are taking place in schools to support the education of students in care?

As part of the survey DTs were asked questions that investigated PLD in their settings. These questions focused on the provision of PLD specific to the education of students in care over the past two years and more broadly on their own PLD priorities. Figure 5 shows that whole school training was the most popular PLD approach and working groups the least popular. Eighty-eight settings had not addressed the education of children in care as part of any PLD activity in the past two years, with the highest percentage (26%) in the early years (Table 8).
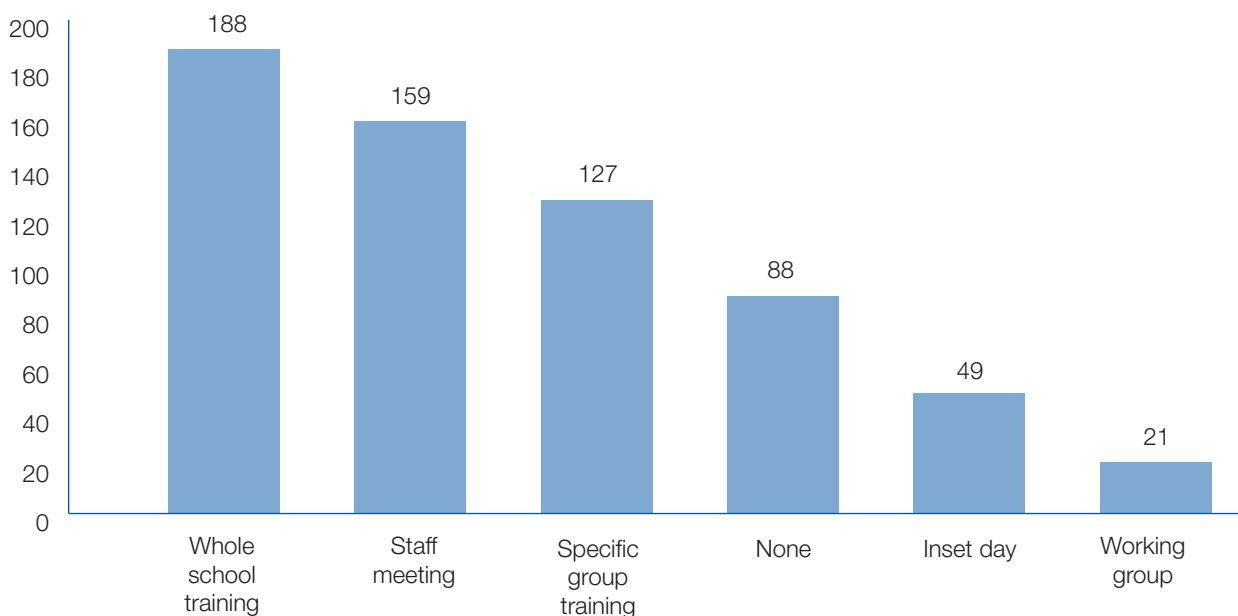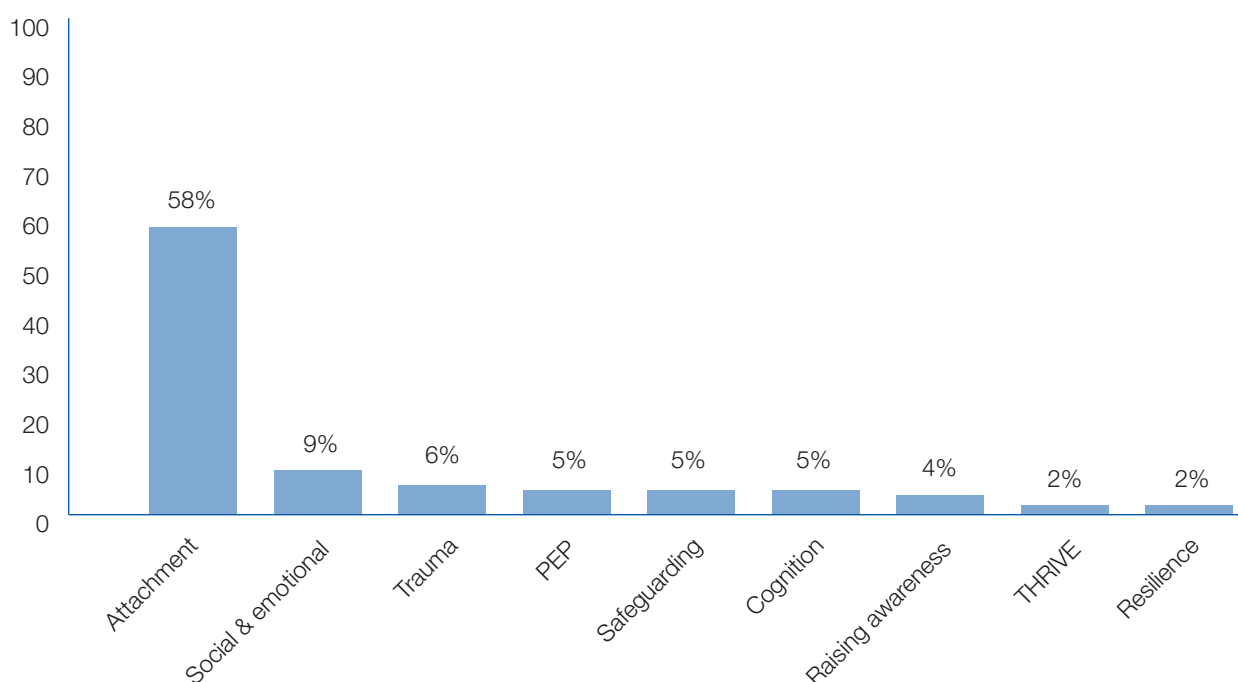

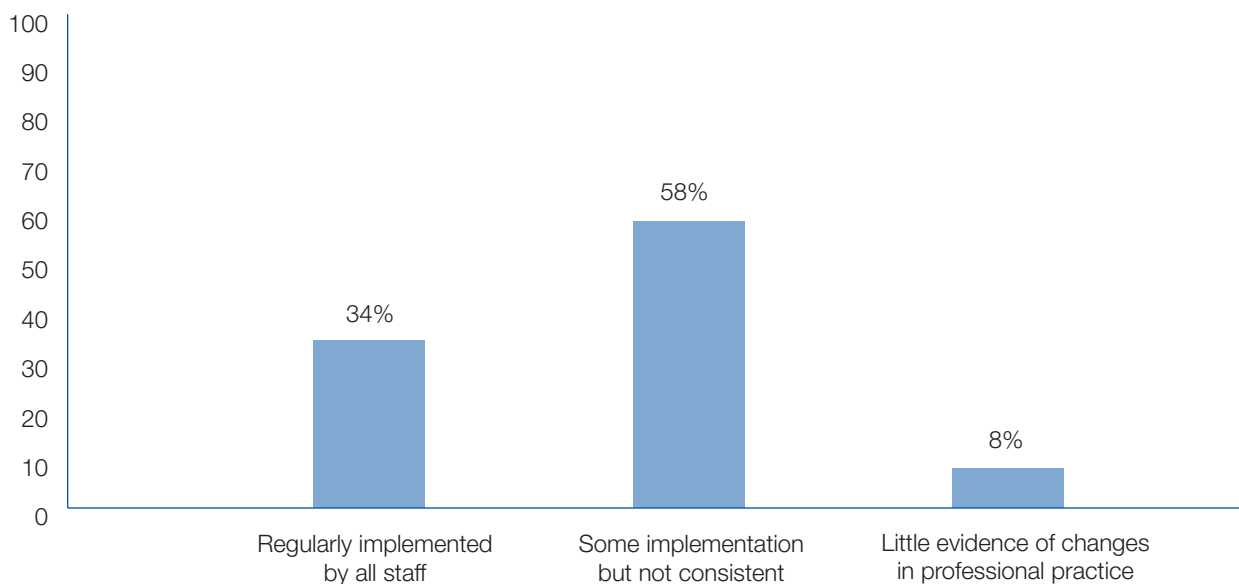**Figure 5: Type of professional learning and development activity**

Table 8: Type of professional learning and development activity (% by phase)

Delivery	Early Years (%)	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	All through (%)	Specialist (%)
Whole school	31	45	59	59	56
Staff meeting	43	38	23	48	44
Small group training	26	24	41	31	36
None	26	21	16	21	17
Inset day	7	11	7	14	22
Working group	0	3	8	7	5

Over three quarters (86%) of the PLD activities in settings was related in some way to social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) and wellbeing development of students, with training on attachment making up 58% of PLD activities overall (Figure 6). The PLD activities not directly related to SEMH included PEPs, safeguarding and approaches to learning more widely.
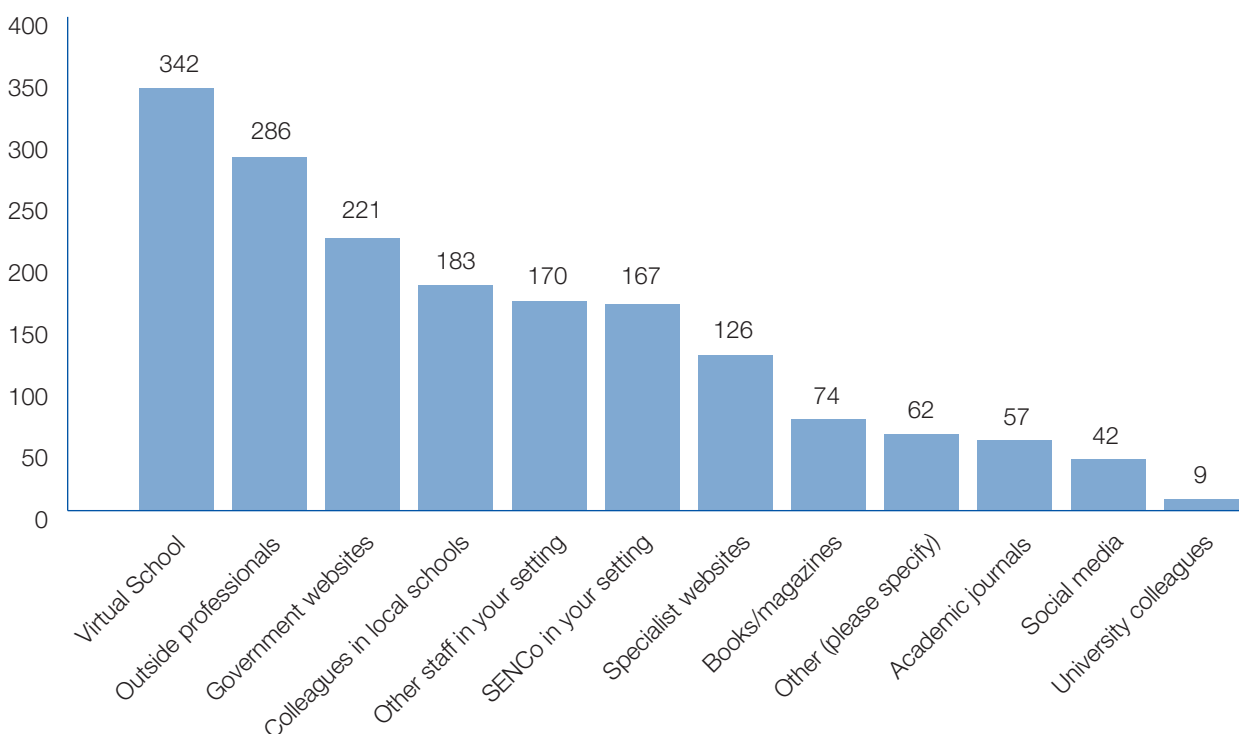

Figure 6: Content of professional learning and development activities (%)

When asked to judge how well the learning from PLD activities had been implemented in their settings, a third (34%) of DTs reported that the learning from PLD was regularly implemented in school. The most common response was that implementation of PLD was not consistently applied across settings (58%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Level of implementation of professional learning and development activities (%)

Designated Teachers were also asked about their own professional learning and development. In terms of where DTs looked for professional support for their role, the Virtual School was the most common response (n=342), followed by outside professionals (n=286) and government websites (n=221) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Sources of professional learning and development support for DTs

Finally, DTs were asked to list the top three priorities for their own PLD from a pre-determined list of options. DTs identified needing to know more about funding (n=231), greater knowledge and understanding of research evidence to support the education of students in care (n=195) and how to influence change in their settings as the most important priorities (n=145).

Three subjects for further PLD were identified as priorities from the DT focus groups: mental health, language and communication and understanding social care. Many DTs felt they needed more training in supporting issues relating to mental health, especially given the reduction in and/or increased waiting times for external support and services. There was a recognition of the boundaries of their role in terms of mental health support but at the same time there was a feeling of there being an 'expectation of so many things to so many people'. The second priority was related to language development. Many of the primary school DTs in one focus group felt that they had observed in recent years a decrease in language ability overall, not just for students in care, coming into school at reception level. More generally, it was felt that students in care were adept at 'masking' language difficulties, with consequences for later academic and examination success. Finally, it was felt that class teachers often lacked an understanding of the social care system and some form of guidelines for teaching practitioners might be helpful.

6   Key findings and recommendations

This report presents findings from a multi-strategy study conducted by UCL Institute of Education, commissioned by and in collaboration with VSH from across the twelve local authorities (LA) in North East England and DAppEdPsy Educational Psychology students from Newcastle University. The purpose of the research was to gain insight into practices in schools, at the child and whole school level, to support the education of children in care and to make recommendations for further policy and practice development.

Previously reported research, including studies that include the perspectives of children and young people, has highlighted many shortcomings of provision in schools and how the education system collectively has not always met the education needs of children and young people in care. This study purposefully identified a group of children who had very positive experiences of education and were thriving in their settings, in order to learn more about more effective teaching and learning in schools to support the education of children in care. The DT survey sought to extend this perspective by gathering a wider picture of current teaching practices and approaches in schools, including the PLD provided to teachers to support their practice across a region. This research is one of the first studies nationally and internationally to observe a child in care in a lesson and then interview the child about their reasons for choosing that lesson and the reasons for their achievements and progress more broadly. It is also one of the first to gather the perspectives of DTs on such a large scale and with a 48% response rate which is higher than most teacher survey responses. Inevitably the study had its limitations; the findings represent just one geographic region, the use of HQT approaches in the classroom was from the perspective of DTs only and some survey data were missing. This section summarises the main conclusions and recommendations from the findings.

6.1   Key findings from the research

Key Finding 1: Characteristics of HQT for students in care

The thematic analysis of lesson observations and interview accounts from the children identified, across both data sets, three common characteristics of HQT: **quality of instruction; classroom climate and relationships** and **developing independence with learning.** In addition, the analysis from the lesson observations showed the importance of **engagement with learning** and the children spoke about the importance of **interaction with peers** for their learning.

Key Finding 2: Embedded and developing HQT approaches

DTs reported a **range of HQT approaches used by teachers** in the classroom. The 'top three' HQT approaches most embedded in practice were: **praise being specific and named, children in care not being treated differently and making learning expectations in the classroom explicit.** HQT practices reported as requiring most development were: **considering the implications of subject specific content and the background of children in care** (such as family trees in history)**; quiet zones in the classroom for learning** and **breaking up learning with kinaesthetic activities.**

Key Finding 3: Additional provision in school for students in care

The most common form of additional support across all phases was **carer involvement** in supporting a child's education. Further common approaches were: **counselling; small group literacy support; behaviour interventions and input from Educational Psychologists.** There was a marked increase of DTs reporting behaviour interventions in secondary phases (92%) compared to early years (63%) and primary phases (69%).

Key Finding 4: Whole school practice to support the education of students in care

Seventy percent of DTs reported that the education of children in care was specifically included in their **setting's improvement plan.** The majority of DTs (76%) reported that their settings had a **specific policy in place for children in care** and most DTs (87%) reported that **an individual pupil profile of strengths and targets for learning** was shared with the relevant colleagues in their settings.

Key Finding 5: Professional learning and development in schools to support the education of students in care

The majority of DTs (86%) reported some form of PLD activity concerned with the education of children in care in the past two years in their setting. Over three quarters of DTs reported that PLD activities were related in some way to the **social, emotional and/or mental health and wellbeing** of children (86%), with training on attachment making up 58% of PLD overall. **Whole school training** was the most common form of PLD approach; with working groups the least reported approach. A third of DTs (34%) **reported that learning from a PLD activity was regularly implemented in their setting** and **over half of DTs (58%) reported that there was some implementation of learning** from PLD activities but that it was **not consistent** across the setting.

Key Finding 6: Professional learning and development for Designated Teachers

Designated Teachers (n=342) turned to **Virtual Schools as the first source of support** for carrying out their roles and for their own PLD, followed by outside professionals (n=286) and government websites (n=221). They identified the need to know more about **funding** (n=231), **greater knowledge and understanding of research evidence** to support the education of children in care (n=195) and how to **influence change** in their settings as the most important priorities for their own professional learning and development (n=145).

6.2   Key recommendations from the research

Children and young people in care respond to HQT that is challenging, promotes peer learning, uses approaches effective for all learners but at the same time is sensitive to the implications of being in care. Annex 1 provides a summary of what all class teachers can do to promote better outcomes for students in care based on the perspectives of the young people in the study. Two key findings stood out from the accounts of the children and young people. The first was how important academic challenge was and enjoyed by many of the children, and the second was the reported importance of peers to learning in the classroom. Collaborative learning is widely recognised as a pedagogical practice that is beneficial for learners both academically and socially. What is not known is if this practice is in any way qualitatively different for children in care compared with their peers and may benefit from further investigation.

The education of children and young people in care with a SEN and/or disability requires greater focus in the classroom. HQT approaches that took into account children who experienced cognitive, learning, developmental and/or social and emotional barriers to learning were not commonly 'embedded' in classroom practice. This is significant given that, as of 2017, 56.3% of children in care had SEN and/or a disability.

Additional support in school for children and young people in care should ensure that all barriers to learning, in addition to any SEMH needs, are addressed. There was a discernible increase in 'behaviour' interventions between the primary and secondary phases and a reduction in the levels of additional literacy support at secondary level. Although SEMH is the most common type of primary SEN for children in care, covering 37.6% of those with a statement or EHC plan and 45.6% of those with SEN support, this means that the majority of children in care have a different type of primary need and are at risk of not being able to fully access the curriculum.

PLD activities in schools reflect the range of barriers to learning experienced by children and young people in care. It was encouraging to find that such a high number of settings had taken part in some form of PLD activity related to the needs of children in care in the previous two years. This is evidence of the work of DTs and VS of ensuring that education of children in care is prioritised, in terms of PLD in schools. However, the finding that 86% of all PLD focused on some aspect of SEMH, including 58% on attachment, indicates that not all barriers to learning are receiving sufficient attention in schools.

Designated Teachers require support from SLT and VS in using evidence informed approaches to implementing and embedding change as a result of PLD in their settings to maximise the impact on student learning. Just 34% of DTs reported that learning from PLD associated with children in care was consistently implemented in their settings. One possible explanation is that the use of whole school trainings events/days, which, if used in isolation, have been shown to have limited impact on changing practice in the classroom.

Annex 1: From me to you – ten small changes in the classroom that can make a big difference to the education of students in care

Below are ten small changes that all class teachers can make to their practice, which can make a very big difference to my education. The ideas are evidence informed, based on research that included the voices of students in primary and secondary schools and on lesson observations of teachers providing high quality teaching for students in care across North East England. I have asked my link member of staff to pass this onto you so that you will be aware of the research. You can find out more about the research on the following link: www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/centres/centre-inclusive-education/promoting-achievement-looked-after-children-palac.

	Small changes	Examples of what primary and secondary students in the study said
	Before a lesson	
1	Get to know me[7]	It did help that she was the PEP person as well.
2	Consider the subject content of lessons this term/year and any implications for my learning and possible wellbeing	Sometimes I think when I look back to my Year 7 history and I used to do family trees … I now think actually that wasn't a very sensitive thing to do if you think about it.
	During a lesson	
3	Hold and demonstrate high expectations of me at all times	Say I'm finding one thing easy, I like being stretched to a difficult thing. But when I'm finding it difficult then I'm getting stretched even further.
4	Treat me like all the other students – but show that I belong	She didn't single me out. It was just like if she saw something was wrong she would ask me if I'm OK and if I wanted to talk about it. But she did that with all students. She was just really kind and easy to talk to.
		I had my art teacher; he was amazing. Then I had my science teacher who literally … he made science interesting for me. I had him from Year 9 through to Year 11 and he was just a really good teacher. He was the teacher that you could go to about anything and not be embarrassed about it.
		She was calm and quiet and she rarely raised her voice.
5	Explain things clearly	And he based the stuff we were learning about on real life topics, and that's always amazing to do.
		When we got the new teacher it was so much better, because she came round each table and talked to us and went through what we needed to do.
6	Check that I understand	I appreciate when they give hints but don't give the answers to the students.
7	Interaction with my peers is an important part of my learning	I feel like I work better with other people.
		Because sometimes if you're working by yourself you get stuck on what to do, where if there's two or three of you, they'll have ideas as well.

8	Enable me to develop greater independence with my learning	Sometimes Ms XXXX does 'see three before me', so you'd have to see three students or try and figure it out yourself before you ask her.
		In the back of my book sometimes I write down new words that we've learnt or new types of methods – like in maths or something; and then the definitions or what to do.
		I was typing it up on my iPad because I'm a digital leader, which is … we've got a lot of IT, as you could see, and me and all the digital leaders are IT support. So we help everybody who need help on the technology if they don't know how to do something.
9	Will I be able to access and complete the homework?	Homework does help and revision lessons.
		Coming to the end of the year homework would become a problem because when we were sitting our English exam, our History teacher, she would give us homework and be like, it's got to be in for tomorrow... Which we'd do, but we'd really struggle.
10	Consider any education materials/opportunities that you might email or post that would support my learning in class but also more broadly including making contact with my carer/s.	Try and do extra work when you are at home to stretch your knowledge a little bit.

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7 Take time to read my Personal Education Plan (PEP)/Learning Profile. This will include what I am comfortable for you to know.

For further information on the programme please contact:

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